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ABSTRACT

Often, reports on poverty present official statements and analysis about its causes, but an official statement is not the same thing as poor people expressing themselves. This report records the life histories of five families living in extreme poverty with the belief that future problems cannot be addressed without an accurate understanding of the history of the very poor. Each of the monographs was written with the family's participation by a team of volunteers from Fourth World, an anti-poverty organization. The histories rely on several years of written records to which were added, according to circumstances, testimonies given on the occasion of specific events, interviews of members of these families, and transcripts of their remarks during meetings. The texts were also reread with the families themselves. Families profiled come from Germany, Guatemala, the United States, Thailand, and Burkina Faso. The second part of the report analyzes common factors in the families' stories to illuminate essential elements for family policies. Contains 11 references. (EV)

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International Movement ATD Fourth World

This is how we live

Listening to the Poorest Families

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International Movement
ATD Fourth World

This is how we live

Listening to the Poorest Families

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This Is How We Live
Listening to the Poorest Families

Translated and revised from
"Les familles du Quart Monde, acteurs de développement"
(Families in Extreme Poverty, Actors in Development)
Presented to the United Nations in December 1993

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We wish to thank all those who contributed to this study.
- First of all the families still struggling to survive and keep their own family members together. They courageously agreed to tell their story " . . . So this will not happen to others. . ."
- The Fourth World Volunteers who supported these families and tried to be faithful to them in writing about their experiences and thoughts, and in developing family policies.
- Many friends throughout the world who made this English version possible.

This Is How We Live
Listening to the Poorest Families
was translated and revised from the study:
"Les familles du Quart Monde, acteurs de développement"
(Families in Extreme Poverty, Actors in Development).

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INTRODUCTION

"We want to bear witness, so that this will not happen to other people. . . " This is what families who live in extreme poverty throughout the world often tell Fourth World full-time Volunteers.[1] The United Nations declared 1994 International Year of the Family. In this context the International Movement ATD Fourth World[2] wanted the thoughts and experiences of poor families to be heard. In August 1994, it entrusted to the Secretary General of the United Nations a report called "Families in Extreme Poverty, Actors in Development." It was composed essentially of monographs of families from four continents. "This Is How We Live" is based on that report.

Why put effort into recording the life histories of people who live in extreme poverty? It may seem a strange use of resources. After all, in developing countries, millions of people are suffering from hunger, violence and contagious diseases. Further, unemployment is a lasting threat to a whole segment of the population of wealthy countries, and forces many people into homelessness.

It is, however, essential for the following reasons. First, changes in society are often sparked off by people becoming aware of the chronic poverty around them. But these changes cannot be effective unless they are rooted in a true understanding of poor people's experiences throughout the generations. Second, the very persistence of poverty raises fundamental questions about what we call progress if it condemns a minority of the population to social uselessness and to dependence. Finally, the poorest of the poor have rarely left written records. This has forced historians to rely on documents from charitable organizations and other groups fighting exclusion, rather than on the collective memory of the poor themselves. We cannot begin to address our society's future, therefore, without compiling an accurate history of the very poor.

This is not an easy task since the very poor themselves often want to keep quiet about their own history because of the suffering and humiliation it represents. "*I do not want my children to know what we have gone through; it's too painful*," they say. Even though life stories, written with people who have known poverty, have existed for quite a while, it is rare that people who are *still* in a situation of chronic poverty and social exclusion dare to tell their story.

Father Joseph Wresinski,[3] founder of the Fourth World Movement, arrived in the emergency camp for the homeless of Noisy-le-Grand,[4] France in 1956. He was immediately struck by the extreme poverty of the families who sought shelter there, by their state of abandonment and even segregation from the outside world. For example, the paved highway came to an end and only a muddy road led up to the camp. Father Joseph Wresinski had spent his own childhood in grinding poverty. He found himself transported back forty years in time seeing nothing had changed. This was decisive for him.

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[1] Full-time Volunteers, see International Movement in glossary.

[2] International Movement ATD Fourth World, see glossary.

[3] Father Joseph Wresinski, see glossary.

[4] Noisy-le-Grand, see glossary.

> *My own life changed from that moment on. Because, that day, I promised myself that if I stayed I would work so that these families would be received at the U.N., the French Presidential Palace, and the Vatican. . . Since then I have been haunted by the idea that this people would never escape from its poverty as long as it was not welcomed as a whole, as a people, wherever others held discussions and debates. This people had to be there, on equal terms, wherever human beings discuss and determine not only the present but also mankind's destiny and the future of humanity.*

Father Joseph's lifetime struggle was devoted to winning respect for this people by ensuring that it could express itself publicly. First he formed with the families of the Noisy-le-Grand emergency housing camp an organization to improve their living conditions. This first organization was banned by the Ministry of the Interior in France. "Respectable citizens" had to vouch for it so that it could gain official recognition.

Father Joseph Wresinski shared in the sometimes unbearable living conditions of the families of this camp and his concern about keeping written records began then. On April 22, 1959, he started a journal jotting down on the first page:

> *I do not know what I want to write in these pages on a daily basis—probably the history of this camp. This would cover its past history, since I have been living in the midst of these people for almost three years. This would also cover its current history: that of misery and of its impact on people's hearts—this is perhaps of no interest to anyone. . .*

One of the projects which he entrusted to Volunteers who came to join him over the years was to write down each day what these families of every race, color and creed told them. This is how a common memory of what the poorest families have experienced has been formed for thirty-five years. Thanks to the commitment of men and women who trust in them, today the very poor can tell a little of their still unwritten history, made up not only of suffering but also of striving to overcome persistent poverty.

To analyze, authenticate and put in order this approach, to understand and to publicize it, Father Joseph Wresinski created the Office of Social Research in 1961. It enabled "grass-roots" workers and scholars to compare their understanding of extreme poverty.[5] The proceedings of two international UNESCO[6] conferences as well as a study done by the Belgium sociologist Jean Labbens, led to the Fourth World Movement's first publications. By chance, the end of the year 1968 saw the publication of the second book by Jean Labbens in collaboration with the Fourth World Movement. Father Joseph Wresinski entitled it "The Fourth World" because, at the same time, he was discovering the "Notebooks of the Fourth Order" which went back to the Estates General which had preceded the French Revolution of 1789. Deputy Dufourny de Villiers wrote that the "Fourth Order" was *"the day laborers, the sick and disabled, the indigent, the sacred order of the underprivileged."* By naming people not included in either the nobility, the clergy, or the peasants (the First, Second, and Third Orders), de Villiers made them exist in their own eyes and those of others. These Notebooks immediately supplied historical roots for the name "Fourth World." The families Father Joseph worked with quickly adopted this name. For the first time in history they no longer had to hide what they had been through. The Fourth World Movement was beginning to restore their dignity, their identity and their history.

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[5] About this method see Appendix I: "Understanding Poverty and Getting to Know Families in Extreme Poverty."

[6] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Since the beginning of the Fourth World Movement, Father Joseph Wresinski and the Volunteers were very concerned with enabling the poor to express themselves publicly. Very poor families involved with the Fourth World Movement first expressed themselves publicly in 1968. During the period of political and social unrest, called in France "the events of May," Father Joseph Wresinski wanted poor families to take part in a movement of free expression which had begun in the universities. "Grievances Notebooks" were passed around in shantytowns and in emergency housing projects where teams of Volunteers lived and worked. Despite different living conditions and ethnic backgrounds, all the families who answered asked for the same rights. These notebooks were summarized in a manifesto: "A People Speaks."

As a result of the manifesto "A People Speaks," some families who expressed their concern asked for regular meetings outside their neighborhoods. In the beginning of the 1970's, the Fourth World People's Universities[7] began in Europe. People's Universities gave rise to international conferences, the first of which was held in 1975. This was followed by a number of gatherings of defenders of human rights. In 1982, 10,000 people came together in Brussels. In 1987 100,000 people gathered on the plaza of Human Rights and Liberties in Paris on October 17, a day recognized since 1992 by the United Nations as the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty.

Father Joseph Wresinski was convinced that we could end extreme poverty and social exclusion only if citizens and leading politicians made it their foremost goal. He compiled the report "Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security"[8] based on the experience of the Fourth World Movement. It was adopted by the French Economic and Social Council in February 1987. It establishes in history a modern definition of chronic poverty in terms of human rights and lays the groundwork for an anti-poverty policy which involves all citizens.

While there are many organizations which represent the poor politically, very few represent the very poor. More and more often, reports present official statements and analysis about the causes of poverty. Still, an official statement is not the same thing as poor people expressing themselves. We rarely believe that they can think about their condition and ways to escape from it. Society, in spite of its arrangements for mutual assistance, its development policies and its human rights struggles, continues to threaten the integrity of its weakest members, namely very poor families. Even though the family is recognized by everyone as the basic unit of society, is it respected as a bastion of resistance against extreme poverty? Is living as a family an inalienable right for all human beings, whatever their living conditions may be?

Very disadvantaged families, members of the Fourth World Movement, realize that their experience of social exclusion and extreme poverty could be useful to humanity as a whole. This is why they wanted to contribute their testimonies to the exchange of ideas promoted by the International Year of the Family.

Each of the monographs presented in this work was written, with the family's participation, by a team[9] of Volunteers who have known the family for a long time. The authors relied on several years of daily written records[10] to which were added, according to circumstances, testimonies given on the occasion of specific events, interviews of members of these families and transcripts of their remarks during meetings. Finally the texts were reread with the families themselves. In this way, they were able to contribute their creativity, their thinking and their views about programs needed to ensure progress for them and their community.

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[7] People's University, see glossary.

[8] Wresinski Report, see Appendix III.

[9] Team, see International Movement in glossary.

[10] All the facts described are thus attested by witnesses. The family members' names have been changed for reasons of personal respect and security.

The families presented in these monographs differ from one another in their ethnic, geographic and religious origins, and live in countries where the Fourth World Movement already has a long history. This does not mean that poverty is more severe in one place than another. For Europe, Germany seemed to be a meaningful choice. The Fourth World Movement has been present in Germany since the 1960s. We will discover the United States, where a branch of the Fourth World Movement began in 1964, through the story of an African-American family who takes us from the abolition of slavery up to life in the large housing projects of New York City. An Amerindian family from Guatemala, where Fourth World Movement activities have been developed since 1979, enables us to understand chronic poverty in a country where the political and economic balance is frequently upset. Africa, where the first Fourth World Movement team arrived in 1980, is represented by three Burkinabe youths who want to find their parents again at any price. As for Asia, the family we chose is Buddhist and lives in Thailand. The Fourth World Movement started there in 1979.

In spite of a diversity of situations, we can recognize common factors from one continent to another, as much in what families have to endure as in their strengths, hopes and aspirations. The purpose of the second part of this study is to analyze these common factors which emerge from the various stories and to show essential elements for family policies, taking into account the experience of the most underprivileged families. These common factors are valid for all human beings. Who else is better able to enlighten us about the importance of the family at the dawning of the twenty-first century than those who fight day after day to live together and to raise their children in spite of everything?

Francine de La Gorce
Fourth World Volunteer

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PART ONE

MONOGRAPHS

THE HIRT FAMILY
GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

Situated at the heart of Europe, Germany has experienced a remarkable expansion since the beginning of the first Industrial Revolution. While this development has brought prosperity to the majority, as in all industrialized countries, it must not be forgotten that this was brought about by the suffering of millions of people. Since the 18th century, German society has been distinguished by the Protestant tradition of charitable works and education of the poor. During the 19th century (1883-1889) the first state legislation in the realm of insurance saw the light of day, thanks to men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds—Marx and Engels, but also Christians and Social Democrats—who contributed widely to the growth in social awareness.

It was also during this period that there were many initiatives to improve the predicament of the most threatened social groups in the country as well as in the towns. Among Protestants as well as Catholics were born the first associations, ancestors of today's great German social organizations which, alongside other "Wohlfahrtsverbände," form part of the modern German social landscape.

In 1914 the First World War broke out, followed by the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. After 1918 the country was weakened by the war, by the reparations paid to the victorious countries, by galloping inflation, and finally by the serious world economic crisis at the end of the twenties. Every new initiative for social policy was whittled away to nothing. Unemployment took on horrendous proportions: six million in 1932. Radical political ferment of the Right was at its peak.

The advent of National Socialism addressed this situation by creating jobs, constructing homes and highways, and developing a sense of national identity with the concomitant effect of labeling those who did not take part as "enemies of the people." The institution of forced labor was one of the signs of this new style of "civic responsibility" to which not everybody wanted to submit, notably among the poor. It has been estimated that 40,000 of them disappeared in the concentration camps.

It was against this background that Hans and Karin Hirt were born. Their lives and those of their family recounted in this monograph took place in this period of German history which was to leave its mark on Europe and beyond. Reconstruction followed the terrible years of National Socialism and the Second World War, which concluded in 1945 with the division of the countries of Europe into two blocs.

On the 20th of June 1948, in order to put an end to inflation, a monetary reform placed all Germans on the same level, each adult having to start from scratch with just 20 Deutschmarks in his pocket. This event is etched in the memory of many Germans, who for a long while were unable to understand why, having found themselves all at the same level, some people remained in extreme poverty in spite of the general prosperity that followed.

However, in the sixties, when the International Movement ATD Fourth World[1] established itself in this country, West Germany set up model housing programs in disused barracks and housing projects for the huge number of homeless people and refugees from Eastern Europe. In 1963, a minimum guaranteed wage was established well in advance of the majority of other European countries. Numerous organizations to support these families were created, particularly among students. Some of these students joined the Fourth World Movement and became Volunteers.[2]

The country's rapid economic success contributed to European industrial and technological modernization, but as elsewhere in Europe, the oil crisis and the economic reorganization caused by these developments gave rise to an awareness in Germany of the "new faces of poverty" which further overshadowed those who had always been poor. This phenomenon increased with the huge influx of people from Eastern Europe seeking employment following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Communist world, and finally the reunification of the two Germanys.

The Hirt family, in the midst of all these upheavals that ended with the creation of one of the richest countries in the world, remained poor even among the poor. Their worn-out bodies branded by suffering and privation also bore witness to their life of toil—toil that enabled them to survive, as Karin said. Still, despite their parents' hard work, their children remained on the margins of modern industrial society, excluded from all the advantages that benefited the majority of its citizens. Not having received sufficient education and skills, they did not enjoy their rights, often out of ignorance, and were not recognized by their fellow citizens.

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[1] International Movement ATD Fourth World, see glossary.

[2] Fourth World Volunteers, see International Movement in glossary.

"We have always been a family."

After more than 40 years of building a family, Mrs. Karin Hirt, now widowed and mother of eight, two of whom died in childhood, expressed both her pain and the goals she has always striven for:

> *We have always been a family. But people said to us, "You don't know how to bring up your children." Why did nobody see how much we loved our children? A mother brings her children into the world, that is why you cannot take them away from her! A family needs calm, peace and security.*

Mrs. Karin Hirt-Weber

Karin was born in 1928 at Reilingen, near Hackenheim. All of her family had its roots in this area. Her maternal grandfather was a gravedigger, while his wife prepared the dead. Karin's father came from a working family who, at the beginning of the 20th century, worked in a tobacco factory near Karlsfuhe. Karin's grandfather was foreman and her grandmother made cigars. Tuberculosis, contracted at the age of 18, pushed Karin's father progressively into the background of this world of work. At that time, people struck down with this illness, for which there was no cure, were able to work only when they could find a job, usually temporary, corresponding to their strength. Karin said,

> *My parents were poor people. My mother worked in a match factory until her marriage. At the age of 17 she had had one child which her parents looked after. After her marriage, she was employed on a farm, working in the fields. As for my father, he had tuberculosis from the age of 18. I remember that this was why my father was nearly always unemployed. He was never able to learn a trade.*

Mr. and Mrs. Weber had eight children, of whom Karin was the next-to-last. Four died young. One son died at age one. Another drowned at the age of 18.

> *It was in 1933. I was six. It was a really hard time. No work, nothing to eat. My brother had gone begging so that we could at least have bread. He drowned in the Rhine. Perhaps he wanted to die, I don't know. He was not discovered for three days. In his rucksack they found several pieces of bread. He did lots of things to help our family to live. He also chopped wood for the gypsies. In exchange they gave him something to eat. They were very poor, too. My mother gave the gypsy mother some of the children's clothes that had become too small for us.*

The eldest, Karin's half brother, after four years in the Foreign Legion in Africa, wanted to stay in Africa, but he was forced to return because of the Second World War. Taken on in an armaments factory, he then left with the German Army for Russia, where he was reported missing.

Karin's youngest brother was also killed in an accident while working in a sawmill. Karin had only one brother and two sisters left.

Karin remembers the pre-war period of her childhood: widespread unemployment, the persecution of the Jews. Her mother did the housework for a Jewish family. But she was later forbidden to do it. The family had to flee; one day they left the village. Karin knew and loved this family. She can still recall how all of their belongings were thrown out of the window and burned.

Karin's father was one of the great multitude of unemployed. In 1933 he was forced to work on highway construction.[3] Karin recalls,

> *My father then worked in an old tractor factory. It had been converted into an armaments factory during the war. My father had to grease the machinery. In the evening he would return home black like a corpse. But he fell ill. It was TB again. In fact he should have stopped working. Although he underwent two treatments for tuberculosis and the doctor filed a claim for him [at the Gesundheitsamt or Health Authority], his entitlement to a pension was not recognized. "Someone who does not want to work, no longer needs to eat," he was told. Three weeks before his death, he collapsed at work. He was brought back to the house. It was in 1944; he was 56, I was 17. Six weeks after his death, we received the summons for my father to take part in the "Volkssturm"!*[4]

Karin spoke of her father great affection. In the evening she was often there when her father took part in first-aid drives for the wounded. He had been appointed to a first-aid team and Karin helped him while she was young. She found it more worthwhile than taking part in the "Jungvolk" (Hitler Youth).

Karin left school, the "Volksschule,"[5] at the age of 14 and did her "Pflichtjahr"[6] (compulsory year) on a local farm. Next she worked in a laundry. It was a private laundry but was used by the German Army and, at the end of the war, by the Army of Occupation. Karin stayed there for four years, until 1946.

At the end of the war life became still harder for the family, as it did for most Germans. Four out of five Germans were malnourished. The most powerful people during these years were farmers, shopkeepers, butchers, and bakers. It was important to be on good terms with them. After her father's death, Karin went regularly to the village to try to find food for the family.

> *I used to go to the baker's and he'd say, "I've got one white loaf left." So I'd ask, "How much?" He'd answer me, "Don't make a fuss; go on, take it." There was also a butcher. He knew my grandparents and my father. He used to put a bit of meat or some sausages aside for me.*

Then Karin said, *"In those days it was like this in all of the villages,"* and added, *"it was not like begging, which my brother did* (the one who drowned)."

She often spoke of the difficult relationship she had with her mother. *"My mother preferred my other two sisters and my brother to me. My father treated us all the same."* In 1944 one of her sisters got married. She stayed at home with her mother, brother, and sister. In 1945 her mother made her get married. *"It made one less mouth to feed,"* said Karin. She was 18 and therefore still a minor according to the law at that time, and it was her mother who had to sign the marriage license for her.

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[3] At this time, Hitler was attempting to fight against massive unemployment through such projects as the imperial highway construction company (Unternehmen Reichsautobahn). Unemployed adults were often inducted into emergency, forced-labor projects with very low wages. In fact, this practice replaced the unemployment compensation insurance established in 1927 and generalized the tendency to put to work recipients of the Fürsorge (assistance/entitlement program of this era), initiated in 1924.

[4] By one of Hitler's decrees, issued September 25, 1944, eight months before the end of the war, all males between the ages of 16 and 60 were obliged to take part in a national defense plan.

[5] The Volksschule (People's School) corresponds to elementary school and to the period of mandatory school attendance for all children.

[6] From 1938 on, all unmarried young women under the age of 25 were obliged to do agricultural and home economics work for a year.

Little by little, Karin lost contact with her brothers and sisters. *"My sisters have always looked down on me. One married a tram driver, the other worked with her husband in a laundry. They never helped me when I was in trouble."* On the other hand, Karin kept a strong tie with her brother. Unmarried and working on farms, he went many times to visit Karin's family. Today Karin asks the question which often preoccupies her mind: *"Is he still alive? I have had no news of him for a long time."*

The man that Karin married had a Polish father and a German mother. This meant that in Poland and Germany alike he was held in poor esteem. He had five brothers and sisters. He had managed to cross the border between Germany and Poland near the end of the war with a foreign worker's uniform of the "Organization Todt."[7]

The war ended, and he worked very irregularly. He could not read or write. Karin taught him basic writing so he could fill in his identity papers. She worked hard. *"Up to the end of September, I worked in the laundry. We used gas irons. They were very heavy."* The new family lived in a room in Karin's mother's house.

Karin was 20 when her first son, Jorg, was born in December 1946. She was therefore still a minor, so that, according to the law, only her father or her legal guardian (if the rights were withdrawn from her husband) could exercise "parental responsibility"[8] without seeking a court decision. But Karin was not aware of this mandatory legal restriction.

Next the family moved to Wessauerhof, a tobacco farm on the outskirts of Reilingen. Karin worked for several hours each day. Concerning her husband, she said how much she felt the burden of an exiled man without status at the end of this devastating war. *"He drank all of the money he earned. We never had any money in the house."*

Once again it was Karin who had to provide all of the food for the family. In 1948, at the end of her pregnancy with her second child, Karl, she set out to look for food on farms. She avoided her own neighborhood and preferred to go where people did not know her. Rail travel was cheap and she went as far as Bavaria, in the region where three "Länder" (Baden-Wurtemberg, Hesse, and Bavaria) border each other. *"The people there weren't stingy,"* she recalled. They nearly always gave her something—ham, bread, apples, and even baby clothes. Once a farmer's wife, seeing this heavily laden and pregnant young girl, even drove her to the station in her cart.

> *Another time I went to a farm. The farmer gave me some apples and bread. On my way to the wash house, I noticed two nice hams hanging there. I said to myself, "He doesn't need all these hams." So I took one down and hid it under the apples. In the meantime the farmer noticed that one of his hams had disappeared and came after me. But I had already got to the station. The guard, seeing that someone was after me, helped me get onto the train, which started off right then. I gave him half of what I had in my bag to thank him. That was good. He told me later that he had six children to feed at home.*

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[7] This organization was in charge of military construction projects, especially in conquered territories. "Fremarbeiter," ("Foreign Workers," either prisoners or, in minute proportions, volunteers) were put to work in these construction projects.

[8] Laws pertaining to the family have been codified since 1900 by the "Burgerliche Gesetzbuch." The "Grundgesetz," (basic law), states in the third part of article 6: "The care and upbringing of children is the natural right of parents and the duty which is incumbent upon them first and foremost. The state monitors the exercise of this parental right."

From the outset, the family's irregular income was not enough to raise their children, and they received the "Fürsorge,"[9] the welfare payments of the time.

Three other children were born from this union. A little girl, born in 1949, died of pneumonia and whooping cough at the age of five months. Karl was also very ill and hospitalized. In 1951 twins, Sabine and Michael, were born. Karin also lost a child before birth as the result of a fight with her husband, and another *"because of all the work I had to do."* When she talked about her family life, her husband and children, Karin was always very reticent. She did not like to talk about her feelings. She was used to fighting. Only when recalling her little girl who died at five months did she add with tenderness, *"She was so pretty!"*

In 1953 the couple separated, after eight years of marriage. But Karin and her husband continued to live on the same farm, the Wessauerhof. *"My husband had a room of his own but he hardly ever worked. I was the one who paid the rent for the room."*

At the time of the divorce, Karin and her children moved into an old cigar factory, which poor families used as lodgings. A little later they found a place in the school buildings at Reilingen: a kitchen and a bedroom. According to Karin, it was when the divorce occurred that the "Landrat"[10] of Mannheim took on the guardianship of her children. Karin heard no news of her husband. The only thing she learned was that after years of hardship he might have committed suicide.

So Karin had to bring up her children alone.

> *I used to get an extra payment from the Fürsorge every year to buy shoes for the children. But I got nothing for myself. I could never buy anything for myself. The Fürsorge wasn't enough to live on. In the village, I helped the farmers working in the fields or with the tobacco in order to have a little more money for the children. And in the summer I used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to collect wood in the forest to heat the rooms in winter. I applied for more money because what I received was not enough to feed and dress us, me and the four children. But the Landrat turned me down. I used to get 160 Deutsche mark a month. So I wrote to Federal President Heuss. An old lady gave me the idea. She said to me, "My girl, you should write to Heuss. I wrote once and I got some money. With the pittance they give you from the Town Hall, you can't make ends meet with your children." She was old and got a pension. I asked her, "What do I say to him?" She told me, "Tell the truth about how you live." That's what I did. President Heuss sent me 60 DM. I thanked him. But then the mayor called me to the Town Hall. My letter had been returned. "What have you been up to?" he said to me. "The Landrat is very upset."*

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[9] A law of February 13, 1924, "Reichsverordnung uber die Fürsorgepflicht," established a general right in principle to material assistance for persons unable to satisfy their basic needs. Yet this was not a right which people could automatically enjoy in some well-defined circumstances, but rather a right which, in fact, had to be granted on a case-by-case basis. As soon as this law started to be applied, there were 2,750,000 recipients. This shows how widespread poverty was in Germany even before the Depression. In 1954, a fundamental decision of the federal administrative court recognized a right to appeal decisions or refusals to grant the Fürsorge. (Adapted from: "Geschichte der deutschen Sozialpolitik, 1880-1980," by Volker Hentschel - Edition Suhrkamp, 1983.)

[10] The Landrat is the president of the council of Kreis, an administrative body placed over the municipal level. He became the guardian of too many persons to be able to fulfill his functions by himself. Legal guardianships were, therefore, delegated to the Youth Office, (Jugendamt).

The Fürsorge was nevertheless increased by 30 DM. But the mayor of Reilingen and the Landrat warned her against doing this again. It was in this weakened state of dependency, a mother alone fighting for her children with all of her might, that Karin met Hans Hirt.

Mr. Hans Hirt

Hans was born in 1925 at Leuterhausen, in the same area as Karin. He was the eldest of six children. His father worked in the railroad marshaling yard and his mother on the tobacco farms. At harvest time she had to string up the tobacco leaves to dry.

> *She worked from noon to five, then went back to the house to sleep a while and look after the children, and at seven she went back until midnight.*

While his mother was working, Hans looked after his younger borthers and sisters. *"I was seven years older than my sister who was born after me."* The family lived in a small house which belonged to them. Hans looked after the garden. He used to collect horse manure from the roads to fertilize the soil. One school friend told him about a farmer whom he went to help during the vacations. Hans went with him. He was ten. The two friends continued to go to work at "Uncle Hermann's," as they used to call the farmer, during the rest of their school days.

Other poor families lived in the village. *"They worked but their wages were very low."* Hans bears out Karin's experience.

> *Around us, the farmers weren't greedy. They helped the poor. It went without saying that they gave vegetables from their garden or a piece of bread they baked themselves. They did not look down on us.*

Hans recalled a family who was poorer than the others to whom his parents gave vegetables from their garden.

Hans left the Volksschule at 14. Then he worked for six months in a chair factory. *"But I didn't like that, being cooped up all day long. I needed to be outside,"* he said. So he went back to work at Uncle Hermann's. He was also a member of the soccer and riding clubs in the village.

Uncle Hermann got Hans an apprenticeship as a dairyman in a farm school near Ravensberg. The course lasted for three years, teaching the theory and practice of milking, the treatment of milk, and the raising of beef. *"We were some 20 young men from all over Germany."* Hans got a diploma as a dairyman. Immediately afterwards he had to complete his six months of obligatory work under the Nazis, the "Reichsarbeitsdienst."[11]

Then Hans went back to his village and signed up with the Arbeitsamt, the Employment Office. But when he reached 18 in August 1943, he was conscripted into the army. *"I was sent into the infantry. I hated it. I did the opposite of what I was told. In the end I was sent to Metz in France."* When he met the officer in command, Hans had a surprise. He knew him! He belonged to the same riding club in the Leuterhausen area. He asked Hans, *"Would you like to clean and cook for me?"* He took Hans on to serve as an errand boy. It was Hans who was sent to requisition food because he knew where to get what the troops needed.

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[11] Introduced by the Weimar Republic, but optional until then, it became mandatory in 1935. It lasted six months. Its goal was to ensure the blending of people from different social classes through an experience of working side by side with "pickaxes, shovels and spades."

After the war Hans returned to his own village and went back to work for Uncle Hermann. He signed on at the Arbeitsamt. One day when he went to collect his ration card, the mayor made him an offer. *"You know about horses, don't you? The Americans are looking for a stable boy."* Hans spent 2 years working with the Americans stationed in the area, until they left. In the course of the next five years, Hans continued to work with horses for one of the big land owners in the area on two different estates belonging to him. Hans got married for the first time in 1949. The couple separated a year later without having any children. From 1952 to 1954 Hans worked on several different farms. On one of these, the Wessauerhof, he saw Karin Weber for the first time. She was still living with her family. Hans then spent four years working on another farm, including a brief time as a dairyman at Neuberg-an-der-Donau, in Bavaria, but he did not stay there because he was homesick. He returned to his native region.

In 1958 he got a job in a refrigerator factory at Ladeburg. He was given responsibility for cleaning the shop floor. A work-mate said to him, *"I know just the girl for you. She's got four children. She was unlucky in her marriage. She is divorced."* Hans did not yet know that this was Karin, whom he had seen some years earlier at Wessauerhof. He recalls,

> *I was also divorced, but I didn't have any children. I went to meet her the following weekend. She looked at me and said, "We've already met!" I also remembered as soon as I set eyes on her. We were married on November 13, 1959.*

Building a family under the scrutiny and judgment of others.

The family foundered very quickly. Hans Hirt, Karin his wife, and the children lived together in Reilingen. Mr. Hirt had a long bicycle ride every day to get to work. For this reason he looked for a new job. In the course of that year he worked in two factories, first a pipe manufacturer and then a sheet metal one. *"I was a jack of all trades,"* he said. Then he found work in a cooked meat plant. He watched the oven where the meat was smoked. *"Because of the smell of the meat, I couldn't eat,"* he recalls. He stayed there for four years until 1964.

The Youth Office in Mannheim stood as guardian for the children. Six months after the marriage, the two oldest children were taken away from the family as they were leaving school and were placed in a home. Mrs. Hirt went to the Youth Office in Mannheim to try to get her children back. She was told, *"If you had not got married, you could have kept your children."* Mr. Hirt was viewed in a poor light at the Youth Office. It was known that his first marriage in 1949 had ended in divorce after one year. On top of that, he had had to undergo treatment for alcoholism but had escaped from the psychiatric hospital. For Mr. Hirt, not being able to see any end to this state of dependence for his family further isolated him in his anger and his humiliation at being poor. Looking back on this painful period, Mr. Hirt repeated, *"I loved them like my own kids and I always worked hard for my family."* Mrs. Hirt, as always, kept quiet about her feelings.

In 1962, the twins Michael and Sabine were taken away from the family. They were undergoing treatment in the Black Forest because they had primary infections. On the day of their return, their mother waited in vain for them on the station platform. Not understanding why they had not returned, Mrs. Hirt went to the Youth Office in Mannheim to try to find out what had happened to them. When she found that her children were already in a home, the boy in one, the girl in another, she became so angry that the Youth Office called the police to get her out.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt say that they never received the court order for the removal of their children. When Mr. Hirt tried to find out why the children had been taken away, he was told, *"That does not concern you, you are not the father."* The family has no papers and no recollection of such a procedure. *"The papers got lost in the course of one of our moves,"* said Mrs. Hirt. There was no doubt that, for her, the second marriage was the reason for her children being put in foster care. This is most likely because the youth officer was the children's guardian at the time of the marriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt did not believe the children would really be taken away when the social workers visited them, and their placement in foster care was organized without the parents' awareness. It was striking to notice how Mr. and Mrs. Hirt remembered details of family life and work with great precision but that memories of their rights and dealings with the authorities were very hazy. They found themselves tossed about in life by decisions which remained remote to them.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt went regularly to see their children in the home. They came home for Christmas and Easter. Two months after the children were taken away, Monika, their first child, was born. One year later in 1963, Hans was born, and a year later a little girl was born but died two days later.

The "Inner Mission" (a Protestant charity) suggested to Mrs. Hirt that before getting pregnant by Hans, she should take a tuberculosis treatment so that the child could be born in better conditions. But she refused. *"What would happen to Monika in the meantime? I didn't need any treatment."* The baby would have gone into a home during this time. Mrs. Hirt was afraid of not being able to get her back afterwards and losing her like the others. Thus Monika and Hans were to be the only ones who, on a daily basis, followed in the footsteps of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hirt.

Wherever the family lived, they were under the scrutiny of the social workers. *"They wanted to see how the children were dressed, if each one had a bed . . . One morning,"* recalls Mrs. Hirt,

> *a social worker from the Youth Office came into the stable. I was there with my little girl. Monika was wearing a white dress. The social worker said to me, "You don't dress children in white on a farm." I told her, "I'll dress my kids any way I like." "But the clothes will all get dirty," she told me. To which I replied, "I've got laundry detergent and it gets rid of dirt. In any case, I'm the one who has to do the washing."*

In 1965 the Youth Office decided that the family's situation would allow Michael to return. He was 14 by then. *"One day,"* the parents recalled, *"Michael arrived. He told us that he could stay at home from now on. The youth worker never gave us a reason why."* But he did not stay with the family for long, as he began an apprenticeship in butchery and only came home on weekends. *"He passed his apprenticeship,"* said his mother.

> *Then everything turned upside down. He started messing about with other youngsters. They stole a car in Bremen. Michael was sent to prison. On another occasion he went with his friends to a disco. They drank a lot and Michael slept outside. It was winter. When he woke up, his money, his shoes and socks were gone. His feet were frozen and he had to have his legs amputated below the knee. He spent six months in the hospital until he could*

> *be put on false limbs. He came home and worked for some time in a service station. Then he left. . . .*

The other children never returned to the house. After the home, they went into apprenticeships, and the two boys later did their military service. However, they never lost contact with their family. Mrs. Hirt's first three sons came to see her at least once every year at Christmas.

"And we took heart when others recognized the worth of our efforts."

When Mr. Hirt was fired in 1964 from the meat plant with several of his colleagues, he registered with the agricultural section of the Arbeitsamt in Heidelberg looking for a job as a dairyman. His wife told him, *"Go back to your trade. You're no good at factory work. And I've always worked on farms. I'm used to it."* He was sent to a farm for a week's trial. *"I used to go on my bike. I had no money. It was about a 50-60 kilometer ride."* Mr. Hirt was accepted and moved with his wife and family to a farm at Odenwald, near Heidelberg.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt talk of their work with pride. He was a dairyman. She looked after the calves. They both helped with other work on the farm. Mrs. Hirt said of this period, *"We didn't have much money but we lived."* It was during this time that Michael came home. However, in 1968 Mr. and Mrs. Hirt had to leave the farm because it was put up for sale. Through a local ad, they found work on another farm at Gutbach in the Kreis area of Crailsheim. They didn't stay there long: *"The farmer was exploiting us."*

Next they got work in Dornstadt, near Ulm, at a rest home which owned and operated a farm. They loved it. They got on well with the old people. *"Every morning at dawn, we'd open the cow shed windows and sing. The residents loved it."* They took their jobs so much to heart that they remember even the smallest details of their work in the cow sheds. This was the only place where Mrs. Hirt ever registered with a pension fund. When Mr. and Mrs. Hirt signed the contract they had not noticed that it was only for one year. They had to look for work again. And as before the whole family had to move again.

They found work and a place to live on a farm near Rästatt the Sybillenhof. They stayed there for six years until 1977.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt said that they had lived in isolation on account of their work on farms. When asked what had helped them pull through, when life was at its hardest, Mr. Hirt answered,

> *The fact that other people recognized the value of our work. This gave me the courage to carry on. The manager of the hospital at Rästatt used to come to fetch his milk. He told me, "Hold your head up, you've got your work and you do it well." We used to do good work for the vet, too.*

On another occasion when a social worker came to inspect the family home, the farmer sent him away, saying, *"There's nothing to look at here! These are working people."* One day all of their son Hans's class came to visit the farm. The teacher asked Hans to explain the work of the farm to his classmates. Hans and his parents remember this day with pride.

The children, Hans in particular, loved to help out on the farm. He said, *"My father was an example to me. I wanted to follow in his footsteps, to learn farm work. I always helped him."*

"You're the milker kids!"

The children Hans and Monika went to school in Rästatt. Mrs. Hirt recalls, *"My kids were despised in school. Their classmates used to say to them, "You're the milker kids, they stink of the cow sheds!"* Mr. Hirt adds, *"In fact they were always dressed in clean clothes."* Every time he speaks of the primary school, Mr. Hirt stresses the scorn that surrounded his children because of the smell. For him their whole life as poor people living and working on farms was to blame.

The children continued their education at a special school.[12] In this school, they felt respected. Their father said,

> *They were well treated by the teachers, and we had a good relationship with them. For the end-of-year festivities we played music together, my son, the head teacher, the deputy and me.*

Mr. Hirt and his son played the accordion even though they never had formal music training. Afterwards, young Hans enrolled at music school in Rästatt, but he had to give it up because the theory courses were too difficult.

The children's education at the special school made it very difficult later to gain access to professional training courses at a time when the country was investing and developing, creating infrastructure and resources, and training high-quality teachers for the good professional education of its youth.

However, for Hans and Monika, the time spent at special school remained a happy memory.

> *There, we felt we were like the other kids. Some came from farms like us. At the primary school, I felt crushed by all my failures. At special school, I was able to build up my confidence again. The teacher took our problems into account. The school's job is to prepare kids for life. Teachers ought to talk to children about what they should learn and what they need.*

Mrs. Hirt added,

> *Preparing kids for life, that's what counts. School must teach them to read, write and count. It should be character forming so that they learn to behave properly. But all kids should be treated the same, rich and poor alike. The poor must see how to get on in life. That's the way it was done in the past and it's the same today.*

She remembered that when her children were confirmed at Rästtat the pastor came to visit them. *"He and his wife were very caring people,"* she said. For the confirmation the pastor had loaned the Hirt family a coffee set so that they could celebrate with the parents that they had invited. She added that since the pastor had changed they no longer had any contact with the parish.

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[12] The "Lernbehinderte" (the learning impaired) form the largest percentage of children attending Special Education Schools. Basically, this category of disabilities does not often exist in other countries. Their academic isolation is the direct result of excessive selection and of a lack of support for pupils in trouble. It is true that, in Special Education Schools, this group finds specially designed and accessible facilities and personalized teaching, but it finds itself permanently branded, and its chances of success in careers and in life are reduced. This is why this kind of school has come under increasing criticism in recent years.

"When you are poor nobody takes any notice of you and nobody needs you."

In 1977, without telling the family, the farmer brought in a dairyman from Bavaria after an argument with Mr. Hirt. Mr. and Mrs. Hirt were sent on their way. A few years later when the farmer died, the farm fell into disuse and was bought by the town. It served as accommodation for the homeless.

Overnight the Hirts were without work or a roof over their heads. They needed to find something very quickly. They approached the housing office in Rästatt and got a flat in the former barracks.

These barracks had been used to house German refugees from Alsace Lorraine at the end of the Second World War. Some people from that period still lived in the barracks in 1977 and some of their children had moved in as well. The authorities in Rästatt increasingly used the barracks for the homeless. This meant people from different social backgrounds rubbing shoulders—from the poorest families to blue-collar workers. Around 200 families lived there.

The outside walls of two large buildings were renovated. But on entering the large entrance hall, the dark and somber atmosphere of the place was striking. The apartments consisted of very large rooms, some of which received no daylight. There were no showers. Two or three families shared one toilet. The years up to 1989 spent in the barracks were very humiliating to the Hirt family. They felt dispised. Mr. Hirt recalled,

> *Before when I went to a cafe I was greeted respectfully. People said, "there's the milkman." But since I have lived in the barracks, since I have been unemployed, we are no longer respected . . . The other people in the barracks said that we were misfits. But outside of these barracks, people told them we were "misfits" too. What does "misfits" mean anyway? I'd really like to know. Are we less than others? When you are poor, nobody takes any notice of you and nobody needs you.*

The family's wish to go back to the countryside was still very strong. They all spoke often of the dream of having a farm. Some time after their arrival in the barracks they got several dogs. The dogs which had had pups, never went out of the apartment which made it impossible to keep it clean. The whole family often went out together for a bike-ride. Once they did a 70 km round trip to visit a farmer on a small-holding from Mrs. Hirt's village, where she had once worked.

"What you have to do is meet up with other people, not stay alone."

The relationship between the Fourth World Movement and the Hirts began during this period in the midst of these difficulties. In 1979 at a soccer game in the stadium at Rästtat, Nick—a Volunteer[13] —noticed a man sitting with his son, shouting so loudly that everyone was giving them a wide berth. Their bodies showed the physical signs of extreme poverty, and it was obvious that this was not the first time people had kept their distance. Nick followed the father and child and discovered that they were going to the barracks. The Hirt family had been there for a year, isolated from their surroundings.

Mrs. Hirt said later about the team,[14] of Volunteers who had lived and worked in the barracks,

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[13] The first Fourth World Volunteers moved to, and lived in, the army barracks of Freiburg and of Rästatt in the 1960's and founded in this way the Fourth World Movement in Germany.

[14] Team, see International Movement in glossary.

> *You could talk with them without having to say to yourself: "Stop! you mustn't say too much about yourself. They're going to read something else into it." When you've been through so many hard times you can't talk to everyone about it. You have a mental block. You need to have more opportunities to meet someone you can talk to in order for things to change.*

Hans, now 18 years-old, had few dealings with the people of his own age who often made fun of him. He often came to the "cultural center" (pivot cultural)[15] run by the Fourth World Movement Volunteers. There the children could learn about books and stories and exercise their creativity. They also had time to do their homework. Hans loved to tell the children what he knew. The children also listened as they rarely had before. Once for instance he read a whole book about horses to two children, one of whom, Heinz, could not usually stay put in one place. School frightened Heinz. When he came to the club, he would cry, *"I never want to see any more books."* For Heinz and for Hans and for many children, the Art and Poetry[16] club is the one place in the neighborhood where people understand their families' suffering as well as their aspirations.

In 1981 a film director and his crew offered to make a film, entitled "An End to Injustice," giving a voice to pioneers in bearing witness to the refusal of extreme poverty in Europe. Mr. Hirt testified before a gathering of the "Fourth World People's University"[17]—with English, French, and Swiss representatives.

> *We must be respected even if we are poor and people must not say "look at him, he's anti-social, leave him alone, we have nothing to do with him, we don't need him!" It gives you such a blow to the heart that you just want the ground to swallow you. To be respected, that means to be considered, to be taken into account, that people treat us like everyone else. There are "shanty towns" near Paris and New York. We also live in shantytowns in Germany.*

In December 1981, the Volunteers left the barracks to start setting up a new Fourth World team in Germany. But, as a result of the relationship established between the people of the barracks, notably the Hirt family, and the Volunteers, the poor families will continue to meet together.

"When you don't know your rights, you are left with nothing even when you have worked all your life."

Having lost his job in Sybillenhof, Mr. Hirt signed on with the unemployment compensation office. He was offered a job milking in Bavaria. He went there but he was not hired. The health of the couple had seriously deteriorated in the last few years. Mr. Hirt suffered from arthritis in his knee. The doctor sent him for two treatments. The government acknowledged his inability to work in 1980. But his pension was very small because of the low wages he received throughout his working life. Even so he said proudly, *"now that I've got a pension, I can look back on a full working life."*

His wife had only been insured for a pension during one year of her working life *(". . . and the Pflichtjahr!"* she always added). For most of the time, she was scarcely paid at all, and for the last six years she had received no wages. She was paid "in kind." *"For the first year, I got a whole pig, for the second, only half and finally only 6 chops."* Because Mr.

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[15] "cultural centers", see glossary.

[16] "Art and Poetry", see in glossary.

[17] Fourth World People's Universities, see glossary.

Hirt's invalidity pension was too small, the family received a supplementary payment from welfare (Hilfe zum Lebensunterhalt).

When his son left school Mr. Hirt took him to look for a place as an apprentice. But because he came from a special school nobody would take him on. Through the Arbeitsamt, he and his sister were offered a course at the "International Bund fur Sozialarbeit."[18] After a test, the two young people were sent to different training sessions. Hans was sent to the cooking section, Monika to the metal-work section. They took introductory courses for the main training program which lasted for 10 months. Next Hans took a class in a hotel kitchen. He only stayed for a week. *"I learned nothing there. They only let me do the washing up."* As for Monika, she found a job washing dishes in a hotel.

Monika met a young Alsacian working in the hotel kitchen. They married and Monika followed him to Alsace. They now have four children.

In 1981 Hans presented himself for military service. He was very disappointed not to get in. Being denied the opportunity to serve his country left Hans at a loss for words. Hans could only view this rejection as a judgment of his own shortcomings, like the contempt he had known in school and the way people looked at him in the street. Once again he did not attain his dream of sharing in other people's ambitions, and being admitted to young people's gathering places. Hans had few of the opportunities usually available to young people to form relationships and make friends. Thus he remained silent about his hopes and thoughts about starting a family.

Hans looked for work on the farms in the area but found none.

> *The small farms could no longer survive. The farmers with only a few cows couldn't make a living. But it was the trade that I had learned and I loved it.*

His father had found work in a sector in decline. Hans arrived in the market at the moment when the need for his training had disappeared.[19] His education also had not prepared him to face the modern world of work.

Several month later, after a fruitless search for work on farms, the Arbeitsamt suggested a job in the polishing section of a furniture factory. A year later Hans was fired because of his frequent complaining. He said he couldn't cope with the fumes of the varnish.

The Arbeitsamt suggested work maintaining parks and gardens. *"I always accepted the work that they offered. I'm not lazy. I prefer working than staying at home doing nothing."* He worked at this until 1983. But the wages were not paid regularly and work stoppages for bad weather were never paid out. This company was well-known to the Arbeitsamt and to the residents of the barracks. Several of them had worked there. The company regularly went bankrupt and started under a new name. After an argument with the boss, Hans was fired. Once again he went to sign on with the Arbeitsamt.

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[18] The "Berufsbildungsgesezt" (vocational training law) of 1969 unified the Lander's vocational training systems, especially training in factories. For most of the young people with no high school diploma (at least no certificate from the Hauptschulabschluss), or those leaving Special Education Schools, the door to vocational training remained closed. As a way of reacting to this situation, the federal government and the Lander enacted a series of measures, such as the funding by the Arbeitsamt (Employment Office) of institutions which are recognized for social work with youths and which provide preparatory vocational training.

[19] The number of persons working in agriculture had decreased nearly by half between 1950 and 1970. In 1985, this sector did not account for more than 5.5% of the total number of jobs in Baden-Wurttemburg.

In 1984 Hans' father found work as a stable worker on a big estate through a small add in a newspaper. Hans quickly took his father's place since his father was not in good enough health to do the job. Hans looked after the horses and also the pack of hounds. With the hounds he followed the hunts which the landowner took part in. He loved this work. But although he worked full-time, he had no contract, he was not insured and he only got a little cash in his pocket. He worked moonlighting for 3 years and had no offers from the Arbeitsamt during this period.

In the spring of 1987 the Arbeitsamt suggested a full-time job as stable worker with a private owner. Hans was insured. But in July *"the owner told me that he had got a letter from the Arbeitsamt."* Hans recounted,

> *In this letter the Arbeitsamt demanded that I go to see them immediately. I don't know what normally happens. I was told that I was to go to work at the horse clinic in Iffezheim. But it was only for the duration of the racing season, for four weeks. At the end of the four weeks I went back to my previous employer. But he had already got two other workers from the Arbeitsamt. My place had been taken.*

It was not clear who ordered this change of employment for Hans.

At 24 Hans found himself once more unemployed. He took up his work as a stable worker with the first employer who paid him a little cash in hand. Hans had only received unemployment benefits for a short time despite his long period of unemployment. He said *"We did not know whether I was entitled to anything. We should have filled in the forms."* His mother was afraid that he would end up in the same situation as her. *"I worked all my life,"* she said *"and I ended up with nothing. No pension. I didn't know what I was entitled to."*

Mrs. Hirt's greatest aspiration was that her children have the status of workers which confers rights. She and her husband had already expressed their views on the changes in society which they had encountered and how people were no longer protected by their community, but supported by entitlements. The fact that they were kept from exercising their rights as workers locked Hans and his family into the painful feeling that they did not deserve them.

Finally Hans went back to work as a stable boy on the premises of the first landowner. But he only received a stipend. Mr. Hirt was proud that Hans had realized his own dream of working with horses. This was a real passion for both father and son. Mrs. Hirt knew the names of the dogs and horses with which Hans worked even though she had only seen the photographs and heard stories about them from her son.

At the landowners', Hans had made himself indispensable. He did his work well and he was skillful in looking after the animals. In December 1987 he had a motor bike accident and had to have several operations. He could not work for six months. His employer came to see him at home to find out when he could go back to work. It was the only job in which his talent really came to the fore but his rights as a worker were nevertheless not recognized.

Back to the farm.

The barracks were so run-down that life became harder and harder. In 1981 it was decided that the state of the barracks' roofs required immediate shoring-up. The Hirt family remembers how from one day to the next the workmen, with no warning, knocked on their door. It was the same for all the families of the barracks. Holes were cut in the ceilings and floors through which to pass tree trunks scarcely stripped of their bark reaching from the cellar to the roof. All around the buildings, wooden fences were erected announcing the start of work. They emphasized the isolation of this place even more during the intervening years when the work was interrupted.

Then little by little as the work progressed, the families were evicted and rehoused, some of the poorest outside the barracks, others inside the barracks themselves. It is often like this when a settlement of homeless people is renovated. And the families which were the most affected by poverty had to live in the middle of this building site. In 1989 the work was almost completed. The Hirt family had already been moved once, but they had been sent to a part of the building that had not been renovated yet. Now they were the last ones left in the old part. In the adjoining apartments, the doors and windows had been ripped out. In one of them, somebody had lit a fire. At the last minute, the family had to move out because the demolition of the interior had begun. But where were they to go? The family had no way to find a place to live on its own. They had insufficient funds and no one would take in a family with three dogs that never went out.

A Volunteer made contact with the housing authority for the town. The authority explained that the family no longer had any other choice. They would have to move to a housing development on the other side of town. This was mainly inhabited by single homeless people. The walls of the buildings of this small housing project were of rough concrete. In winter, condensation ran down the walls inside the houses. The Hirt family refused to move there because of the project's condition and also because of their poor health. Mr. Hirt suffered badly with arthritis. He could no longer play the accordion with his twisted fingers. Mrs. Hirt could hardly walk because of the bone protuberances on her feet, and rarely left the house.

Time was short. The authorities proposed one room in the barracks for the parents and another on the top floor for their son. But the family did not want to be separated and refused the offer.

Another possibility presented itself: to move to the farm where they lived before they came to the barracks and which was now abandoned. However, the three little rooms in the basement which formerly housed the farm hand were going to be attributed to them. The rooms were very dark and there was no running water in the kitchen. Despite the run-down appearance and the isolated location, the Hirts decided to move there. The move was so rapid that one part one their belongings was left in the barracks and thrown out.

For the family the farm was a symbol of hope. They could live in the country again and keep dogs. Above all they felt released from the atmpsphere of scorn in their former environment. Mr. Hirt restored the vegetable garden and raised chickens and rabbits. Just like his wife and son, he said "*without nature and without animals, I can't live.*" Some time later, Hans (junior) said "*I'm really at home again here.*" ("Heimat," or home in German, has a much stronger sense). "*I spent a good part of my childhood here, I know every stone.*"

Refugees were placed by the city administration in the rest of the house. One night a fire broke out. One of the Turkish refugees died of his burns. The apartment destroyed by the fire was never restored. The black walls added to the desolation of the farm, making it look like a real slum. Gypsy families with their caravans spent the winter in the courtyard.

"We need to get together and talk together so that people will know we exist."
In 1989 just after the move, Mr. and Mrs. Hirt joined a delegation of Fourth World families received by Pope John Paul II in Rome.[20] Each group of families was prepared to bear witness to the lives of the poorest of their own country. During the preparation for this meeting Mrs. Hirt explained, *"whether you are Muslim, Jewish or Christian, there is only one God. We are Protestants, but it is important to tell the Pope what we think and how the poor live."*

Mrs. Hirt could hardly walk. She needed a wheelchair to get to the meeting, but she was determined to participate. Before meeting with the Pope, the Fourth World families met at Mery sur Oise, France, where Father Joseph Wresinski who had died one year earlier was buried. They did not go in remembrance of his death, but rather because they could identify themselves with him and draw strength for their meetings.

> *Father Joseph had a hard life. Those who have led a hard life in their youth, they know what he has started. He knew poverty and humiliation and he has helped the poor to get recognition.*

For Mrs. Hirt who said this, something has changed. She has met other families who have been through the same experience as she, who have followed the same path together and who, because they are together, can bear witness to their lives. *"We don't want to live in the lap of luxury, we want justice, we want to be treated with justice."*

From this meeting with poor families from all over the world, Mr. Hirt drew an important observation about his life:

> *I think we ought to be with other people from other countries. The poor can talk together. Even if our language isn't the same, we can still show each other that what we do comes from the bottom of our hearts.*

On returning to Rästatt, Mr. Hirt told the other people he knows about the meeting. He contacted the local newspaper which agreed to interview him and published an article on the meeting.

In February, 1991 Mr. Hirt died of a heart-attack at the age of 66. At his death, his own struggle for a roof and a dignified life for his family had not come about. He left his wife and son in the basement of a farm, abandoned by the community, having striven all his life to settle in this rural environment.

However several month previously he had announced to the team of Volunteers in Germany *"We have won a great victory."* This was on the day that Mr. Hirt learned that the Inderchitt[21] family living in a tent in the forest with their eight children had got a real place to live. Mrs Hirt added,

> *I'm really delighted that the Yeniches family have got a house now and that their children can go to school. As I always say: It's not with money that you can first and foremost help the poor. What comes first is accommodation and*

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[20] A meeting between Pope John Paul II and delegations of very poor families from around the world took place on July 27, 1989 in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.

[21] A gypsy family from the "Yeniches" ethnic group which used to travel extensively throughout Europe. Today, many of them live in Alsace, France. The Inderchitt family participates in the "Three Countries" Fourth World People's University with other families from Alsace, from the Canton of Basel, Switzerland and from Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany.

> *work and that they are treated like everyone else. . . So that the poor can fulfill their own obligations themselves.*

Mrs. Hirt had noticed how being rehoused had changed Mrs. Indershitt: *"she was relaxed, she made jokes."*

In spite of his fight to secure housing, Mr. Hirt had not succeeded in enabling his family to live in dignity when he died. Even though he had tried all his life to be recognized as someone in this rural world, he left his wife and his son living in the basement of a farm abandoned by the whole town.

Mr. Hirt's family, friends, some Volunteers and also several residents from the barracks got together for Mr. Hirt's funeral. Mrs. Hirt's two oldest sons were also there, both married with children. One worked in a chemical factory with his wife. The other, after learning to be a baker, worked on road construction. But neither of the twins were there. No one had any news of Michael. Sabine was living alone with her four children somewhere in Bavaria. Mrs. Hirt had little contact with her. Sabine had come several times to ask for help from her parents; she had a lot of problems.

Monika, Mr. and Mrs. Hirt's oldest daughter, lived with her husband and five children in Alsace. On the day of the funeral she was not amongst those who were taking part in the event together. She had come the day before, but then left. Will she ever know about the small gifts her father had prepared for his grand-children and which were given to other children, because his dream of reuniting the whole family at the end of the Easter celebration had never come to pass? The grand-children will never know their grand-father.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirt, like so many parents, knew how much material privations and, above all, the disrepute linked with extreme poverty and dependency are debilitating. Disrepute threatens the close connections with other family members which any family must provide. And yet Mr. and Mrs. Hirt's actions, which seem so clumsy and limited to those who are free from extreme poverty, bear witness to this quest for continuity which they wanted for their children, for their family and for all families.

> *I hope to find a bigger place in a village to live one day and to be able to invite families from the Fourth World People's Universities and others so that we can get together and talk, so that people know we exist.*

Mrs. Hirt also remembered her own life.

> *I never hung my head even if things went badly for me. When life is tough you need a sense of humor. A sense of humor is very important! And what you have to do is to meet up with other people, not stay alone . . .*

DOÑA MATILDA
GUATEMALA

INTRODUCTION

Fourth World Volunteers[1] have been in Guatemala since 1979. The first team[2] of Volunteers was asked to come by an organization called Caritas, created in the U.S. They quickly sent workers to Guatemala to run programs in poor communities emphasizing the training of young people from Guatemala.

First the Fourth World Volunteers lived and worked in a small village, San Jacinto. In 1988, another team settled in Guatemala City, getting to know areas where poverty was worse. One Volunteer wrote:

> Today, we are holding the first Street Library[3] in a place called the "Ferrocarril," along the railroad track, where hundreds of very poor families find shelter. We selected a location close to the large marketplace where people with no income come in hope of finding a little job. . .
>
> The shelters, made of wood and sometimes cardboard, line the track on either side, with only a tiny space between them and the railroad track (in some places, less than one meter). The earth, furrowed by the rain and waste water, gives way to puddles in which water and garbage mingle.
>
> We come across lots of children. Some are playing, some working. Children carry water or wood back to their shelters. Some little girls of seven and over carry a younger brother or sister on their shoulders, wrapped up in a piece of fabric in the Indian fashion. There is one source of water, a small public fountain where women stand in line to fill their jugs. The plastic jugs are lined up on the ground. Waiting time is spent chatting.
>
> While walking, we talk with a few adults and children. We speak with a man who has a little store, a little makeshift shelter like the others, opening onto the outside offering a few products of basic necessity.
>
> We explain to him that we would like to start a library and show books to the children. He initially thinks that we are looking for a locale. We explain that the activity would take place in the street. A little further, there is a man pushing a cart. He is selling ice-cream. He is accompanied by his son of around ten who is helping him with his work.

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[1] Fourth World Volunteers, see International Movement in glossary.

[2] Team, see International Movement in glossary.

[3] Street Libraries, see glossary.

A small group has already formed. Someone shows us a place where there seems to be a little more space because the shelters are a little further removed from the track. *"You can set up your library here."*

I set up "shop" there and children come forward. They take the books I suggest to them. One mother comes out to offer me a chair. I tell her that I don't need one. Still, she comes back not long afterwards with a crate on which I place the books. For some time, another Volunteer continues to visit the families to invite other children.

Certain children are well-dressed, others barefoot and poorly dressed. Some already know how to read, others obviously do not. But they gather around us, pleased to discover the books we brought to them.
(Excerpt from the August 1989 record by the Volunteers who operated the first Street Library.)

* * * * *

March 17, 1992 . . . A small group of adults meets for the first time in a very poor district in Guatemala, along a railroad track overlooking a large marketplace. Doña Xiomara opens her door to three or four neighbors. Doña Matilda, her friend, whose story will be told here, is part of the group.

The Volunteers know these men, women and relatives well because each week since August 1989, a team of Volunteers and friends has operated a library and a pre-school in their area.

Ideas are expressed by several participants. This date of March 17 reminds Doña Matilda of the commemoration of October 17,[4] 1991 during which two of her children participated in a play with children from other underprivileged areas.

> *What if this year we presented a play by adults from various areas to show our life of grinding hardship? We could do it too, like our children!*

And thus, on the 17th of each month, from March to August, a show is slowly put together thanks to the testimony of men and women from this area who are joined by other adults living in a garbage dump. The two themes which can be singled out are a life of wandering—experienced at least once by each of the members of the group—and the danger encountered in poverty-stricken environments.

Indeed, whether alongside the railroad track, on the edge or top of a dump or on the side of a ravine, the dwelling places to which the very poor are driven are endless sources of danger, particularly for children. How many children and adults have survived being smothered by an avalanche of refuse? How many makeshift shacks have escaped being washed into the ravine by floods of mud in the middle of the rainy season? How many shelters have survived the onslaught of the top-heavy loads carried by railroad cars?

From September 17 to October 17, the adults spend considerable energy at rehearsals, intent on sticking with their project, aware of the commitment they have made and of the value of the message they want to convey. This time is taken from their daily working hours which do not even suffice to make ends meet. They have to stop doing laundry, a means of earning a few "centavos." They must see to it that their children, who cannot be left alone because of the trains, are kept busy. Sometimes they even have to give up a meal because money hasn't come in at the usual hour.

Doña Matilda is at the heart of this enthusiasm. She reminds everyone of the rehearsal schedule. She spends time with neighbors disheartened by continual worries, while she herself hopes against hope that the show will live up to the group's expectations. And indeed, the dialogue comes spontaneously to the actors' lips, for it is their own lives they are portraying. A choir of children who participate in the street libraries joins them. A refrain in praise of fraternity and hope punctuates the performance.

* * * * *

"Poverty forces us to live in places like this."

Doña Matilda, 32, lives in one of these shelters on the edge of the railroad track, a single room measuring approximately 9 x 9 feet, with her five children and Maria, a young Salvadoran woman who has been staying with them for almost one year. At the back of the shelter, a mechanic's workshop can be detected by the noise of water leaking through the disjointed boards.

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[4] October 17, see glossary.

The earth floor is not level. Two beds occupy one half of the room: one in good condition, the other—which Doña Matilda will sell at a time when she is penniless—has two broken legs, replaced by a large stone and a tin can turned upside down. A little table and a very rusty trough-shaped wood stove covered with a grill occupy part of the wall. Laundry basins are piled in a corner. On the wall, a few photographs and drawings from the Street Library are stuck between boards. During the daytime, a curtain fluttering in the wind is a makeshift door. There is neither running water nor electricity (on the other side of the track, some families have tapped the public electrical supply on the sly). A clothes line is tied to the pillars of the facade. A long bamboo pole planted in the middle holds up the line, forming an angle on which the clothes dry, swept by even more wind. When the train whistles in the distance, the occupants hurriedly pull up the pole and bring it into the house, preventing the laundry from being swept away by the engine or the cars.

The parents and elder children who are responsible for the little ones live in constant fear. This is why they often confine themselves to their houses. As Doña Matilda says,

> *The train makes you nervous and the children are not free to play unsupervised. We need a playground where they would be able to play freely without any danger.*

This fear haunts all the parents, and it is easy to understand as we listen to Doña Olivia tell us about the accident which occurred on September 21, 1991.

> *It must have been eight in the evening. My four children and I were in bed. My husband had gone to work on the coast eight days earlier, the day after Joselito's birth. A very loud noise tore through the night. Dina, my eldest daughter, wanted to get up, but I told her to stay inside because it was raining hard. Immediately afterwards, the house caved in on us. At the crossing, 20 meters from my home, the train had run into a police car driving without headlights. The train took with it the facades of eight houses and stopped its course inside our house. I felt the presence of death . . . Joselito, my eight-day old baby, could not be found. I was terrified because I heard him cry once and then heard nothing more. We were buried under sheets of metal. Later, people said they called out to me but I heard nothing, nor did they hear me.*
>
> *The fire department, which had been alerted, managed to dig us out of the ruins. The atmosphere was awful. Everyone was screaming. I was losing my mind because I still did not have my baby in my arms. A fireman found him under the rubbish, safe and healthy. He walked away to examine him, but I screamed because I was afraid that he was taking him away!*
>
> *Neighbors put us up for the night. The next morning, I realized that I had lost everything, all our belongings had disappeared during the night. We decided to occupy the other side of the track, where a man had taken shelter under a sheet of plastic. It was truly filthy, with rats and white lice.*
>
> *I was the first to build my shelter. Neighbors helped me. I never felt abandoned. For eight days, Doña Matilda spent the night with me, until my husband came back from the coast. Two or three days later, other shelters were rebuilt. The police had been told of our "invasion." As I had been the first to invade, it was me they took away, with Joselito whom I had not had time to change. I explained the accident and the necessity of having another*

> *roof over my family's heads. The police let me go that evening. No compensation was paid to us by the railroad company or by the police. On the contrary, we were blamed for living on land which didn't belong to us . . . But where could we have gone?*

The Street Library and preschool are held just across from this row of rebuilt houses, and set four or five meters back from the track. But the area is not large enough to house the number of children who come, up to one hundred. Some sit on the rails to read and draw. When the train approaches, the children get up slowly and there are always two or three of them who can't resist hanging onto the cars.

The railroad track is a place of refuge for the very poor, including the Indians who have abandoned their high plateau. The poorest hope to find better living conditions in the capital, and others are fleeing regions of conflict. They meet up here.

Many people walk along the track, primarily people living along its edge who use it to go and look for water; to go wash their laundry at the washing hole; or to go to the marketplace to sell candy, cookies and fruit they have purchased from the trucks that arrive from the center of the country. Little groups of children play marbles or hop-scotch, turn tops, play cards, or simply play with the soil. Two or three ice-cream cars are parked. Men leave to push them through the streets, ringing a bell. One frequently runs into policemen doing their rounds, two by two.

Two areas, on very different levels, are bordered by the railroad track in this district: to the northwest, zone 8, very steep-sloped, is occupied by low-income housing and businesses, primarily automobile repair stops; to the southeast, on a lower level, zone 4 covers the large marketplace district, then farther away, an extensive commercial and administrative district.

Thirty-second Street crosses the track and runs into the large "Terminal" marketplace. The streets which cross it are bustling with activity. They are crowded with stalls, most of them kept by Indian women from the "Occidente" province, sitting on the ground surrounded by their goods. On the edge of the market, trucks unload fruit and vegetables in categories: mounds of melons, pineapples, potatoes, onions, nets filled with avocados or oranges. . . . In the middle of this district is an enormous covered market housing a multitude of small shops on two stories. The "Terminal's" name originates in the bus terminal serving the western part of the country, among other places "Occidente." The "Terminal" is located on the other side of the market, opposite the railroad track. The Terminal, due to its market, the largest in the country, and the presence of buses which converge here from numerous inland localities, is an excessively animated area in which thousands of poor families ferret out myriad alternatives for surviving.

Beginning in 1930, approximately twenty poor families took refuge along the railroad track (state property belonging to the Railway Company). Other portions of land all along the line crossing Guatemala from the northeast to the south were invaded in following years, particularly in periods of crisis and following the earthquake on February 4, 1976, which left thousands of families homeless.

The land constitutes a sanctuary of last resort for the very poor, as do the other dwelling places chosen by the destitute (dumps, ravine flanks, etc.). Due to their location, no rent is required of the families, except in certain places by unscrupulous persons who introduce themselves as the owners of the land and claim rent. The families have always been more or less tolerated along the track, although on several occasions they have been threatened with eviction.

Three years ago, serious confrontations occurred in the Terminal district between railroad workers and the families occupying the track. The latter resisted, claiming other land if they were to be evicted. It was during the election campaign. Promises of re-housing gave them hope, but after the elections there was no follow-up. For a year and a half the families heard about a new re-housing project for them. The land along the railroad track would be sold to a company with city planning projects under way. In the early 90's, things came to a head, and the families were asked for a certain sum of money to be entitled to re-housing in the peripheral area. But not all of them were able to put together such a sum of money—although it was not large. Doña Matilda said,

> *I exaggerated my income. Otherwise I would not have been entitled to the land. What worries us also are the monthly payments we will have to make to repay the loan over 20 years. This month, we must come up with the money for housing entitlement. I don't know how I'm going to do it, I have nothing to sell. I worry constantly and can't sleep at night. I have my laundry basins which I could maybe sell for 25 "quetzales" a piece, but I need them to work.*

The families hope to obtain land which offers necessary utilities and a better environment.

> *Here, on the track, we aren't on our own property. Furthermore, the area has a bad reputation. Young people take drugs. I would be ashamed to give the address to my family if they wanted to visit me.*

The other problem which would arise following re-housing in outlying areas would be the cost of public transportation for most people working in the Terminal. For the past three months, the families have had no news of the project. Some are talking about staying on the track whatever happens. Life goes on here, with people struggling more than ever from one day to the next.

"It's very hard not to be able to count on a mother."

Doña Matilda has not always lived in the neighborhood described above. When she was asked to tell her life story, she spoke first of her childhood memories. She told her story with a sense of modesty and suffering, but also with the hope that her children's lives will be less difficult.

Chronic poverty constantly threatens family unity. Doña Matilda knows this because she experienced it from her very early childhood on, and she constantly reminds us that whatever she undertakes is done in the hope of keeping her own family together.

Matilda grew up without her mother; when she was six months old, her mother left home. Was life so hard that it became impossible? Matilda was of course too small to witness the tragedy of the situation, but it affected her entire life and even today she tries to understand. "*My mother was driven out by my father because he thought she had been unfaithful.*" This is what she was told.

> *My childhood was not a happy one. I didn't grow up with my parents, but with uncles and aunts, then with my father and a stepmother. I never knew the warmth of a mother. I was never kissed by a mother, comforted when I was sick. Perhaps my mother had reasons to leave home. There were two girls; she took my older sister, and left me with my father.*

This absence haunts her. She would like to understand, but can understand only one thing: she does not want her children to be torn apart in the same way.

Matilda's childhood was spent in a small village of southeast Guatemala. Here people lived off the land, a dry soil which required hard work. The family did not own much land, and it did not yield enough to meet the family's needs. The entire family constantly had to seek some means of survival and even the children had to contribute to this endeavor. There was also a certain solidarity among the members of an "extended" family. Thus, after the departure of Matilda's mother, her father was able to count on brothers and sisters to help him. Until the age of five, Matilda was raised by an aunt of whom she remarks today: *"She was good to me."*

When Matilda was five, her father began living with a woman who apparently never considered her as a daughter.

> *My father "forced" a stepmother on me. She didn't love me, she beat me. I was afraid of her . . .*

She then had three half-brothers. But in front of their friends, they spoke of Matilda saying: *"Oh, she's not our sister." "They,"* says Matilda today, *"had a childhood which was different from mine. It was beneficial to them."* Matilda cannot talk without crying about the part of her childhood which followed her father's second marriage. *"It was then that I really began suffering."* She remembers having been treated roughly by her father's wife and she attributes her damaged teeth and her poor sight to this painful existence.

For Matilda, the chronic poverty in which the family lived required that she do exhausting work. Before sunrise, she had to fetch a supply of fresh water, in other words go get water at the public fountain and bring it back in buckets to fill the house's large stone tanks. When she used to get up, she would feel a certain fear in her stomach having heard so many stories about spirits wandering in the night. Today, she questions these old beliefs and says with a smile: *"I have never met any. God must surely have protected me!"* Then, the day was filled with a series of household tasks: cooking the corn, grinding it, preparing the tortillas (a hand made corn pancake). At mealtimes, she carried them to her father who was working in the fields, a good distance from the house. There was also the laundry to wash: *"It was my job to find soap!"* And Matilda participated in the work in the fields as well.

> *I worked from a very early age: I went to get water for the cows, I drove the pigs to the meadow, I took the goats out. I helped my father put fertilizer in the fields, or cut corn, watermelon and melon. We never stopped. He was just beginning to make ends meet, he didn't have any hired help.*

Matilda also remembers a time when she was around eight when there was no more income in the house. Her father went to the coast to buy bags of grain which he then resold in his village. This enabled them to open a little store. Matilda spent her time there serving customers. The family was more comfortable. Her father even bought a cow. The business was not profitable for long however and after a few years, her father transformed it into a bar.

The burdens weighing on Matilda as a child left her no time for school. Her father himself had never gone to school, *". . . but he still managed to keep his accounts!"* Matilda's work seems to have absorbed all her time and energy. Today, when speaking of this period of her life, she says:

> *I was not able to develop my mind. I didn't have the freedom to think. I always had to work. If I were to learn a profession now, I would have a hard time because I didn't have an opportunity to develop my mind as a child.*

Today, Doña Matilda is able to talk about her childhood with much more perspective, and sees positive aspects:

> *At least, I learned how to work and get along in the world. If I had not learned how to prepare tortillas, or to wash clothes, what would I do today to earn a living and raise my children? I live on what I learned . . .*

When Matilda was 14, one of her aunts suggested that she go to the capital. For her, this represented an opportunity she did not want to miss. She fled from her village and accompanied her aunt.

"I got a taste of freedom at last."

Matilda's aunt lived in a very poor area, not far from the center of the capital in the first shantytown spawned by the city's expansion. Matilda spent three happy years with her aunt from the age of 14 to 17, during which she went to school for the first time: *"I did not lose a single year. I really wanted to learn and I retained everything."*

These years marked Matilda's life because at last she was able to get a taste of the freedom she had lacked so up until then. Freedom of movement, freedom of mind: *"My mind was free at last to develop."*

To help her aunt and pay for her studies, Matilda worked from six in the morning to one in the afternoon in a little local grocery store. At two, she went to school. For Matilda, this was not too heavy a load. She also made friends in the neighborhood. She experienced a totally different life, until the day that a cousin of hers who was older tempted her with promises of an exciting future and proposed that she come and live with her in a working-class area on the outskirts of town:

> *My cousin helped me run away from my aunt's house. She said to me: "Here you will never improve your lot in life." She turned my head around. I was full of illusions and I believed her.*

As a matter of fact, she ended up working for her cousin who exploited her unscrupulously. Matilda became her maid and was no longer able to continue her schooling, working day and night, watching over four children and cleaning house without earning a penny.

In front of people outside the family, the cousin introduced Matilda as a servant, refraining from mentioning the fact that they were relatives. This wounded Matilda enormously and reminded her of the attitude of her half-brothers who asserted in front of friends: "She's not our sister . . ."

Matilda put up with this situation for almost one year. She often thought of leaving, but did not dare. She was afraid of finding herself alone in the street in this huge city. Naturally, she could not consider returning to her aunt's house any longer. Where could she go? When her cousin accused her, without any grounds, of having an affair with her husband, that was the last straw. She decided to flee an atmosphere which had become intolerable. One day, her cousin gave her a little money to go on errands at the Terminal market. Matilda took the opportunity to flee and never returned to her cousin's house. With the little money in her pocket, she decided to try to get along alone. She was barely 18.

Matilda was therefore alone in the Terminal district, an area she was not at all familiar with. She wandered through the narrow streets, undecided, seeking a job. She asked in several places and was rather rapidly hired for a trial period in a restaurant.

> *I told them that I had already worked in a restaurant so they would hire me. The first day, I worked non-stop. I was ashamed of serving customers at their tables and I hid in the kitchen. The stone sink was green with moss and I began scrubbing it until it was pristine. But there was an older waitress and as you know, older employees want to "kill" the young ones. She sent me back to the dining room to wait on tables. But it went well. Our boss was very pleased with me. She soon gave me a raise. I worked there for two years.*

Matilda was soon taken in by one of the restaurant's customers.

> *God must have put this older lady, Doña Rosa, on my path. She housed me. She came to the restaurant where I worked every day to eat. She lived in the area. We got along very well. Her daughter, however, was jealous of her mother's affection for me. I decided to leave in order to avoid problems.*

Matilda rented another room in the area. That was when she met Christobal. They became friends and lived together. When she told him that she was pregnant, he took the news badly and left. This was a terrible disappointment for Matilda who hoped that she could create a family with the man she loved. Sorrow made her pregnancy difficult. She stopped eating.

Her boss at the restaurant took her in. She offered to be the godmother of Matilda's child if it were a boy.[5] Matilda accepted. On October 23, 1980, a tiny little Clara Luz was born.

From that day on, her boss's attitude toward Matilda changed. Matilda had given birth to a girl; she did not want her as a god child. She hired Matilda to work in her own home, demanding a huge amount of work for a woman who had just had a child. She would not allow Matilda to nurse her baby to prevent her from doing it during working hours. When Matilda was scolded for work she had not finished, she decided to leave with her daughter.

> *I went to wash my daughter's diapers at the public washing house. My hands were bleeding because I wasn't used to washing.*
>
> *There was an eleven-year old girl there washing clothes. We began talking and she took me to her house. She lived with her widowed father along the railroad track. I told them about my problem and that I didn't know where to go. They took me in and I stayed with them for one year. During the day, I worked. I washed clothes, I also went to sell onions which I purchased in 100-kilogram bags. And I had a place where I sold charcoal-barbecued meat. Thanks to my work, I was able to buy milk for Clara Luz.*

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[5] In Guatemala, being a godparent often brings material obligations with it.

This situation in which mothers work in the "informal sector" has been pointed out many times in numerous countries of Latin America. Ten years ago, a Colombian report pointed out that 46% of the urban population earned less than minimum wage. In 1981, an estimated 2.3 persons per family in low-income households worked and the number of working hours per household per week was 98. Thus, in addition to the tasks performed by the mothers, the children are called upon to work, often at a young age, depending on their family's degree of poverty.

The work performed by mothers, described in another survey, bears an uncanny resemblance to the work we find in this monograph: laundress, cardboard seller, seller of lottery tickets, itinerant vendor, seller on the market, bottle collector, household servant. . . .

But Clara Luz fell ill and had to be hospitalized on two occasions. *"I sold my clothes, my dishes, almost all I had to pay for her treatment."*

Doña Matilda stayed at her daughter's side. Mothers of hospitalized infants were allowed to stay at their bedsides during the day, often in order to nurse. For Clara Luz, this was not the case, but her mother managed to stay without any problems. During the night, however, the mothers were not allowed to stay in the rooms. They could be seen in the corridors, lying on the floor or in the street close to the hospital entrance. After one month in the hospital, Clara Luz was allowed to leave. *"I thanked the Lord. I had succeeded in keeping my daughter, and she was again with me."*

When she returned to the railroad track, Matilda learned that the little she had kept had been stolen. In her despair, she was taken in by a neighboring family, in Doña Maria's shack. There she stayed for several months, until one of the sons in the family was married. After that he and his wife were given the room which Matilda occupied.

> *So I left. I didn't know where to go. For three nights, I slept at the Terminal bus stop. I spread out a sheet of plastic on which I put Clara Luz to sleep. I couldn't sleep. I was too ashamed to be there.*

Doña Xiomara's and Don Domingo's family took her in with Clara Luz for a few days. Two families living in a single room rapidly caused tension. Matilda and Clara Luz went to live with Doña Xiomara's sister, Doña Esperanza, who lived with her husband along the railroad track also. Matilda stayed with her for several years.

At this time she met Carlos who lived in the same neighborhood. The conditions under which they were living never allowed a family life. Santiago was born on September 29, 1982. Carlos was a security guard in a factory. He devoted all his free time to his hobby, mechanics. He repaired radios, watches, etc. in the street. Santiago, very attached to his father, showed an interest in this work at an early age. He salvaged bolts, screws and nuts which he picked up in the street and kept as though they were a precious treasure.

When Santiago was five, his father was assassinated in the street by someone who wanted to get even with him. Matilda's relations with Carlos' family were not excellent. Her sisters-in-law gave false testimony bringing about the loss of an orphan's pension for Santiago.

And yet still today Doña Matilda speaks affectionately of Carlos, the attention he devoted to her, his fatherly love for little Santiago, the material responsibilities he took on, even if he did not live with them. At that time, Clara Luz, three, and Santiago, several months old, went to the "welfare" day-care center during the day. This center, reporting to the government, kept children for a negligible fee while their mothers worked. Clara Luz and Santiago went there for three years. Then the admission conditions changed; the parents' work permits, lung x-rays, and blood tests were required. Because she could not produce these documents, Doña Matilda withdrew her children.

At the outset of 1983, destitute families began occupying a large piece of land on the outskirts of the city. The "Metzquital" would become one of the largest shantytowns in Guatemala. Doña Matilda worked for a deposit bottle recycler. She washed up to one thousand bottles per day, and worked during her lunch hour to increase her pay. She decided to try her luck at Metzquital. She began occupying a tiny parcel of land, so little that neighbors teased her about it. When the parcels were distributed, she received one and built a makeshift shelter where she went every evening with her two young children.

Her schedule was exhausting. In the morning, Doña Matilda and her children mingled with the crowd pushing to get into the buses at the bus stop to travel to their work places in the capital. She left her children at the day-care center and then went to work. At 5 p.m., she picked up her children and spent an hour in the bus to return to Metzquital. During these trips, Clara Luz and then Santiago were slightly injured in the scurry of rush hour. After one year, Doña Matilda decided to give up her parcel of land given the danger she and her children were exposed to. She sold her rights to the parcel and returned to live by the railroad track.

Doña Esperanza's family took her in a second time. She lived with them for two years. Doña Matilda then became pregnant with her third child.

"At last, I was in my own home, even if it was just a shack."

At that time, the makeshift dwellings occupied only one side of the railroad line, the Terminal side. Neighbors urged Doña Matilda to settle on the other side of the line, where land was occupied by push carts and clothes lines. Doña Matilda hesitated for a long time because these parcels were also owned by the railroad company. Furthermore, a man who used the land for storing equipment objected to Matilda's settling there, blaming her for having had children without being able to put a roof over their heads.

> *The people were on my side. They convinced me. One morning, three men helped me clear the land and build my shelter. That evening, I was in my own home at last. The rain leaked into the shack, and I remained awake to repair leaks and shelter the children.*

After six years living on the edge of the railroad track, Doña Matilda had wanted her own house. She was aware however that her "own house" was an entirely relative concept, because the Railroad Company could evict the families occupying their land illegally from one day to the next . . . Benito was born several weeks later on May 26, 1986.

Other families very rapidly followed her and invaded the edge of the land on either side of her shack. Doña Matilda rapidly extended her hospitality to other persons living in the street.

This land occupancy phenomenon already existed before the 1976 earthquake. At that time however, it attained gigantic dimensions because over one million people were homeless. It still continues today. Families without their own homes invade unoccupied land by the tens and hundreds, building makeshift shelters at first, then organizing committees to attempt to obtain ownership rights from the authorities. The authorities are torn between eviction, tolerance, or accepting the occupancy situation. In the last case, they lend support to projects to improve the infrastructure surrounding the land and provide utilities (drinking water, drainage, etc.).

Doña Olivia and Don Chepe, with their three children, stayed with Doña Matilda for two years before occupying another parcel farther down the track. Thanks to the presence of Doña Olivia who took care of the six children and cleaned, Doña Matilda was able to work outside and bring back money to live on.

> *Once I had my house, there were always people in it. One day, someone said to me, "With all the people your house, why don't you put a sign out saying 'Room & Board?'" I believe God is testing me to see how much heart I really have. I know that my children will receive a little food from someone. I'm not doing that for myself, but for my children. I also know that perhaps one day my children will need a place to sleep. I hope that what I'm doing [taking people in] and what other people are doing also, will be repeated everywhere . . .*

Companion and mother: ***"This is the first time I've had a home."***
In 1987, Doña Matilda met Esteban, a man of her age, who worked as a laborer in a carpenter's shop. They got to know each other. And Esteban often tried to meet with Matilda, for any reason he could find.

"Esteban also had a past of suffering," Matilda told us. He had a very painful childhood, living with his mother and a violent stepfather in an atmosphere of extreme poverty, to the point that he was on the streets at the age of nine. He worked to survive: he shined shoes and then worked in a "tortilleria." He then decided to find his father and one of his brothers. He succeeded and lived with them for a long time, while continuing to work. He then had the opportunity to join a carpenter's shop where he learned the basics of the craft. Doña Matilda knew Esteban's father. They both were very fond of each other. But tragedy struck again: over a period of several months, Esteban's brother was assassinated and his father died of illness.

Sometime afterwards, Doña Matilda did not see Esteban for several days, until one morning when a stranger came to see her on his behalf. He had had an occupational accident, and had to remain immobile. He lived in Metzquital, far from Matilda's house, but absolutely wanted Matilda to be informed. She did not wait long before going to visit him. They fell in love and decided to live together. After his accident, as soon as Esteban was able to move on crutches, he joined Doña Matilda in Ferrocarril.

> *We lived together. He used to say to me, "This is the first time I've had a home." I gave him a new start in life.*

For Matilda also, it was also the first time she had a home. A true family life began for her, with a father at home, *"He was a good person; all my children called him 'Papa.'"*

Esteban suffered the after-effects of his accident. He tried to resume his work at the carpenter's shop, but his wound caused him too much suffering. He did not loose heart. Gifted with his hands, he sometimes made stuffed animals or plastic flower arrangements and sold them on the street. Doña Matilda, who always worked a great deal to raise her three older children, was able to stay home more. This was very important for Esteban and his work was enough to feed the family.

Esteban's presence in the family gave Doña Matilda the time and opportunity to attend meetings of village "improvement" committees.

> *A committee for a fountain project was created. I was a member, and I liked it. We really made an effort, running everywhere to get signatures.*
>
> *Afterwards, a nutritional project for children under six was set up. The children had to be weighed regularly. Don Domingo had gotten hold of some scales. Each child was entitled to a package of food for a mere pittance. But people didn't always take advantage of it. They had to be reminded. The project lasted six months. We were tired of having to run after people. Perhaps they were afraid of being humiliated because of their poverty . . .*
>
> *Then a doctor declared that the warehouse where the food was stored no longer met sanitation standards. Things became complicated. We stopped. Nonetheless, I have always enjoyed being on committees.*
>
> *I like helping people, even if it means waging a battle.*

Nicolas was born on October 17, 1988. Difficulties arose in the couple, particularly due to Esteban's tendency to drink. There were times when he left home, but he always came back. Esteban and Matilda tried to overcome these difficulties together and start over.

"If I hadn't suffered so much," said Esteban, *"I would not be this way."* Doña Matilda added,

> *When he's drunk, he calls me a beggar because I have no more contact with my family. He can also be very violent. When he sobers up, he says that he can't remember his insults. "Maybe it's my nerves," he says, "I'm going to change."*

This situation made Matilda suffer and she wondered, *"Does he really love me? Perhaps he only stays because of the children?"*

Then doubt gave way to hope because both of them were trying to build the family life which they so desperately needed. Doña Matilda said,

> *He loves his children, and he treats the older children I had before just like his own. Nicolas loves him a great deal. When he's with his father, I no longer exist. Santiago loves him also. Sometimes he prepares a good meal for us. And I feel really funny sitting there doing nothing.*

One day in January 1990, the police took Esteban away when he was drunk. A neighbor, who witnessed the events, warned Doña Matilda. She immediately left the house. She wanted to know where he had been taken. With the money he left her, she ran all over town, from one police station to the other, but in vain. Esteban was nowhere to be found. Two days later, she went to a prison and found Esteban. The next day, she brought him a meal.

Esteban had been sentenced to three years in prison for repeated drunken brawls. Matilda's life collapsed. She used up all her money and had to begin to work as soon as possible. She got a night job in a restaurant where she took Clara Luz who watched over Nicolas who was still nursing. This situation lasted for three months until the day a waitress accused Matilda wrongly of having stolen money. Doña Matilda, profoundly humiliated, preferred to quit. "*What made me suffer the most was the humiliation. People think because we are poor, we steal.*" She stayed home with her children and didn't want to go outside. She had never felt so desperate in her life.

> *At that time, I was caught in extreme poverty. I didn't open my door any more. Dirty laundry piled up in a corner. I didn't have enough money to pay for water or soap. I prepared only one meal per day. My children went to bed without having eaten. Once they had fallen asleep, I broke down into tears, heartbroken at having to see them in such a situation. One night, I prayed to God from the innermost depths of my being: "I am your child, why are you abandoning me this way? You know that my children go to bed with empty stomachs." I don't know what happened, but the next day, neighbors brought me their laundry to wash. Life was about to change. For the past three years, my work at the wash house has put food in our mouths.*

For two and a half years, Doña Matilda and her children visited Esteban in prison. Transportation was expensive. Their visits were not frequent, but each time, plans took shape for a new life together with no violence. Esteban said, "*We'll never fight again. I won't drink any more; we'll start our life together again.*"

The prison was rather flexible for prisoners who were not dangerous. Visits were authorized almost every day. Inside the prison grounds, a small village had been formed, with stores and restaurants. The family could therefore spend some relaxed time with the prisoner. Couples were even allowed moments of privacy.

Doña Matilda became pregnant. Dimitas was born on January 12, 1991.

For the entire period of Esteban's incarceration, Matilda continued to struggle as best she could for her children. She enrolled them in school. It was difficult under such circumstances to complete a scholastic year successfully, but for Doña Matilda, this was important:

> *The only thing which will remain after my death is their education. It will enable them to go forward, alone . . .*

Despite her tenacity and courage, Matilda had to face many moments of daunting poverty. Recently, she said:

> *Each day, I have to find something to eat. There are days when we have nothing. The people who give me their clothes to wash are poor also and can't pay very much. Yesterday morning, I went off to wash at 5 o'clock in the morning. When I came back, my children had still not had anything to eat. I asked them to go through the garbage! With the money, I was able to*

> *prepare them breakfast at 11:00 in the morning. That afternoon, a neighbor paid me for the laundry I had washed. That way, we were able to have dinner that evening.*

In April 1992, Doña Matilda learned that Esteban's prison sentence could be reduced by six months. The family was overjoyed at the thought of having Esteban at home again. One month later, Esteban was released from prison. Doña Matilda found out that Esteban's former companion had contacted him again while he was in prison. It was she who apparently paid the fine for releasing him from prison. Esteban and Matilda both suffered due to this touchy situation. Esteban was torn between his companion and Doña Matilda. Finally, Doña Matilda made a decision:

> *I said to him, "I don't want to make you suffer. Go back to her if you want to. You can come to see the children every day.*
>
> *I am poor, but that's no reason. I'm not resigned to poverty. I don't want you to play with my feelings. I don't want to live an impossible existence. I want a little peace and quiet for my children."*

"I would like my children to have a fine future."

Whatever Doña Matilda undertakes, she does in the hope that her children will have a better future. During the many interviews we had with her to prepare this monograph, this hope was visible at each instant. At the same time, we felt how much the constant threat of chronic poverty weighing on her family dismayed her. Doña Matilda, who still bears the wounds of her childhood, is convinced that for her children, nothing can replace a family. She knows that she alone can provide this guarantee to her own children.

> *As a child, I sometimes thought, Why was I born? I should have died when I was little in my mother's womb. But later, God gave me children. My children have a mother. I cannot give them wealth, but I can give them my tenderness.*

Even at the most difficult times, Doña Matilda does not give up:

> *Where do I find the strength to go on? In my children! . . . Who will struggle for them, if I don't?*

If Doña Matilda used the term "struggle," it is because she is struggling against poverty. She's never absolutely certain that she will win the battle. In the end, will her children have the future she dreams of giving them?

Clara Luz

For the first two years of her life, Clara Luz did not leave her mother's side. She lived at her rhythm, carried on her back in a large piece of fabric tied in a knot over Doña Matilda's breast. This is a frequent sight among the very poor: they go to work—sometimes performing very difficult tasks—with their youngest child on their backs.

Doña Matilda had always been haunted by her desire to ensure access to school for her children. In January 1989, she enrolled Clara Luz, eight at the time, in the first year of elementary school in a school close to the railroad track. This was very difficult for Clara Luz. First of all, she was hardly prepared to enter school. She was put with children who had already attended pre-school. Then, she felt rejected. And indeed, it was a neighborhood school in a working class area, but one in which little girls like Clara Luz, who live on the edge of the railroad track, are pointed at. They were called "beggars," and "down-and-out." Clara Luz, of course, suffered from this and did not want to go to school anymore. Doña Matilda encouraged her to continue.

Other obstacles, however, arose. How could a child learn anything when she lives in a shack with no electricity, chair, table, or place to open a notebook to do homework? How could writing and reading exercises be done when one has to sit on the front doorstep to have enough light, surrounded by the noises of the neighborhood, the coming and going of little brothers in and out of the shack, and people walking by the door all the times?

And then, like all little girls—particularly the older ones—from very poor families, Clara Luz had to help with household tasks: straighten up, wash, fetch water, watch over her little brothers. To preserve a very precarious family equilibrium, Clara Luz had to help her mother. But Doña Matilda tried not to ask to much of her:

> *If I say to Clara Luz, "Hurry up and straighten up this room!" she balks. If I say, "Come on, let's straighten up together," the room is tidy in no time.*

All these factors contributed to the failure of Clara Luz' first year at school. After having encouraged her daughter to persevere, Doña Matilda realized that it was to no avail, that her daughter was not learning. So she allowed her to drop out of school mid-year.

In 1990, the situation was different. In January, when one normally thinks about taking the children to school, Esteban was put into prison. The Volunteers were aware of the family's state of mind. Its survival was so threatened that school was out of the question. Doña Matilda worked at night, taking with her the baby she was still nursing whom Clara Luz looked after. After several months, due to the efforts made by Doña Matilda, the family situation again stabilized. But it was too late to enroll her children in school. Doña Matilda was already thinking about the next year. She constantly urged her children to learn. When she brought them to the Street Library, she said to the Volunteers, *"I would like my children to participate, it opens up their minds."*

In 1991, Clara Luz was again registered in the first year of elementary school, but in another school. Classes were in the afternoon.[6] These hours were better suited to the family's schedule. But above all, the atmosphere was different. *"In this school, we're treated well,"* said Doña Matilda. *"Clara Luz feels good here."* Doña Matilda still had in mind the failures of preceding years. So she attended to her daughter's work. Since she knew how to read and write, she was able to help her daughter if necessary. The year went well and Doña Matilda proudly told about a parents' meeting where she was congratulated by the teacher for her daughter's behavior. She did not want to miss any meetings, even if she had to give up working hours. She felt it was too important for her children's scholastic success.

"I don't send Clara Luz out to make cornmeal, she doesn't do laundry." In saying this, Doña Matilda expressed her wish that her children not be made to work.[7] And yet, when she was alone with them, she could not always avoid it. She explained,

> *In poor families with many children, one income isn't enough. I am both father and mother at the same time. A piece of wood by itself doesn't catch on fire.*

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[6] In many schools in Guatemala, children usually attend classes either in the morning or in the afternoon.

[7] Paid employment, and not household chores, in which children do participate.

This is why, in difficult moments, Clara Luz did little jobs and brought in a little money. Thus, in 1992, Clara Luz went to work in a restaurant for part of the night with Maria, the young woman lodged by the family. Clara Luz rested in the morning, and went to school in the afternoon. That year, Clara Luz successfully completed her second year in secondary school and was beginning her third year in 1992. Her mother always talked the future:

> *Clara Luz would like to complete her sixth year, but it would be wonderful if she could continue afterwards to study the "basic" program.*[8] *It will cost more, but she's thinking of working to pay for her supplies and continue her studies.*

Santiago

November, 1991. The Volunteers went to get Santiago so he could take part in a theater workshop. He was nowhere to be found. They met Doña Matilda in the wash house.

> *I don't know where Santiago is. He leaves in the morning and comes back in the evening. He hangs around in the street. I'm worried, I don't like it when he does that. What can I do? I have to be here all day washing clothes, otherwise we have nothing to eat at home.*

In a few words, Doña Matilda expresses all her anxiety and that of all families living in extreme poverty. Precarious living conditions and the ceaseless quest for sustenance prevent parents from taking care of their children as they would like to. Children do not have enough supervision. Doña Matilda lives with her anxiety and she knows that the best way of doing away with it is to maintain a warm family atmosphere no matter what happens:

> *Whether you're rich or poor, bringing up children requires tenderness. A child must be given self-confidence. If there's a problem, it should be discussed with him; hitting him does no good.*

An entire chapter of the study mentioned above is devoted to the challenge which access to elementary school education constitutes for all children, and the aspiration it constitutes for the families and government of Columbia, as well as for other Latin-American governments. "For the poorest families, under-employment, unemployment, insecurity and the absence of income are all factors which undermine all areas of life and contribute, in extreme cases, to shattering the family unity and to destroying the possibility of living out a life together. The children are the ones who pay the heaviest toll to poverty. They are burdened with heavy responsibilities at too early an age, and in most cases are removed from school, and deprived of the opportunity to be educated and receive professional training, and are thereby in danger of perpetuating their parents' lot in life. . . .Indeed, how can these children educate and train themselves while their families need their working potential at a very early age? How can they pursue their education with regularity, when their family does not have secure housing and is often without a roof over its head? And, finally, how can these children, already scarred by poverty, gain acceptance and show others that learning is possible under such conditions?"

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[8] The "basic" program corresponds to the first entry year of secondary studies.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

When Santiago was eight, Doña Matilda enrolled him in an institution called "Hogar para Todos," which works with children with problems. Students can be day pupils or boarders. Santiago was a day student, arriving in the morning and going home in the evening; he was in the first year of his elementary school education. Doña Matilda initially saw the advantages of this school: it was free, Santiago would be in school and spend the entire day there, which would prevent him from hanging out in the streets. But slowly, things appeared less positive to her. First of all, it was not certain that he would get an elementary school education certificate. And Doña Matilda wanted her children not only to learn, but also to have a recognized certificate in their hands. She knew that this was a guarantee for the future. But what made her the most unhappy was to see that Santiago was not happy there: *"He didn't like the school. He was often sick; he was losing weight. After three months, I withdrew him."*

Santiago spent over one year out of school . . . and a great deal of time in the street. *"It worried me,"* said Doña Matilda, *"because I was afraid he would get on the wrong track."*

Santiago was a rather turbulent child, but he was nonetheless attentive to his little brothers, whom he baby-sat from time to time. He sometimes also went to the dump to salvage scraps of boards and wood which were used for the fire.

At the beginning of 1992, just before the beginning of the school year, Doña Matilda worked for three days in a village on the outskirts of the capital where the annual national holiday is celebrated. She offered her services to a little restaurant where there was always a lot of work. The good pay allowed her to buy uniforms, shoes and school supplies for her older children. She was also able to enroll Santiago in his first year at school in the neighborhood. Santiago liked the school, even if it was not always easy. His mother told the Volunteers,

> *He doesn't like to miss school, but he also wants to go out and play. He's getting attached to the street. He goes out even when he has homework to do.*

Doña Matilda stimulated him and helped him to the extent that she could, as she did with Clara Luz. Santiago completed his first year of elementary school successfully at the age of ten.

At the very beginning of 1993, Doña Matilda did not have the same job opportunity as she had the previous year. She had trouble paying the costs of sending two children to school.[9] Furthermore, as school took up only half a day, she was really afraid that Santiago would be tempted to spend the rest of the day in the street. So she thought about sending him back to "Hogar para Todos," and of making a new attempt, given that this institution would keep him for the entire day. She hesitated, however, due to his unfortunate experience several years earlier.

In the neighborhood, the children were in constant contact with children and young people who sniff glue. *"My Santiago,"* said Doña Matilda, *"has never been seen carrying glue."*

She did not say this with an overtone of victory, and even less to cast aspersion or to judge those who did take drugs. She was only too aware that these are signs of extreme poverty. She simply said it because she had done everything she could to see to it that her son *"does not get on the wrong track, which leads children to their doom . . ."*

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[9] In a public school in Guatemala there is no registration fee, but a parent must pay for an inexpensive uniform and school supplies.

* * * * *

Uniting to fight poverty.

After months of rehearsal, backstage in a university auditorium, the group Doña Matilda brought together is panic stricken: *"Will we succeed?. . . "*

Many very poor families have come with them from various locations, including the most destitute run-down areas in the capital. Matilda says:

> *With a Volunteer and a friend of the Fourth World Movement in the province, we looked for families in one district of the capital called Eureka. Each time I enter this district, I have the impression of reaching the farthest limit of something, the impression that a more horrible, underprivileged district cannot exist. The same cardboard scrap metal shacks made of any salvaged waste . . . the same garbage piled up here and there. . . pieces of plastic drying on a clothes line. . . the same mess. . . the same mud, puddles of water which never dry up. . . the dump which stretches away into the horizon.*
>
> *I merely followed this Volunteer who knocked on the doors of newly built shacks. A mother who was not going to attend the commemoration was going to the dump with two of her children. She left with an empty burlap bag and broomstick with a hook on its tip. Another child was pouting. . . All I understood was that his parents could not come and that he would have liked to accompany us. It seemed hard for him and he went off to hide . . ."*

In the silence of the room, which is almost full and in which 350 people are seated—families from the most underprivileged districts, friends from all horizons—the actors meet their challenge and give the best of themselves.

Their message strikes a sensitive chord in this audience which has come to partake in the suffering and hopes expressed, the suffering which comes from always being on the outside, the hope for peace and justice for all.

Doña Matilda, the adults and the children's choir leave the stage, pride swelling up their breasts. Families who do not know them come forward to thank them for the testimony they have dared to bear.

Their district still has a bad reputation; life there is still as difficult, but something has changed. A testimony brought before the world with strength and dignity remains engraved in the hearts of each and everyone.

THE JONES-ROBINSON FAMILY
UNITED STATES

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth World Movement full-time Volunteers[1] and the Jones-Robinson family first met in October 1970. The Volunteers were living in a first floor apartment on the Lower East Side of New York City, in an old building that resembled many others on 4th Street in this poverty-stricken section of the city. This part of the street between two avenues was considered to be one of the poorest in the neighborhood. The year before, in agreement with neighborhood parents, the Volunteers had opened a little center for school age children in the basement of their building. It had been furnished with odds and ends for a library and other cultural activities and was open each day after school. The children came and went as they wished, but when a new child arrived, the Volunteers visited the family to confirm parental approval.

So, after Doreen, Sandra, and Cindy Jones, eleven, eight and six years old, appeared at the center for the first time, a Volunteer visited their home which was just a few doors away. That first visit was followed by several others to establish and strengthen the relationship and to collaborate with the parents as they planned for each child. Gradually, the Volunteers became acquainted with all the members of the family except the oldest daughter who, like some other members of the extended family, stayed in Georgia, their original home. In 1978, the Volunteers met Mr. Jones' mother and his youngest sister, Carrie and Jenny Robinson. In a short time, they became active members of Fourth World Movement.

The daily reports of Volunteers who knew the Jones-Robinson family over an extended period of time form the basis of this monograph. The reports are combined with dictated accounts of specific events and recorded notes of meetings the family participated in. Also, over time, the Volunteers conducted interviews, especially in 1992, when the family wrote their history as part of the International Year of the Family project.

Taken together, all these elements offer an African-American family odyssey covering more than a century of U.S. history. This family, like millions of others, passed suddenly from rural to urban poverty, from a world of almost total segregation where life was determined by unremitting hard work to a world where diverse, poor ethnic groups lived together and where work of any kind became almost unattainable.

We could have made this same journey with other families: Puerto-Ricans, Chicanos of second generation Mexican immigrants, Native Americans, or whites who encountered, like the Jones-Robinsons, constant poverty over several generations. The Volunteers' experience of life shared with the families of all these ethnic groups, often apparently in opposition, taught them how their lives and their hopes mirror each other.

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[1] Full-time Volunteers, see International Movement in glossary.

In this account of six generations, the Jones-Robinson family members rarely referred to the political events punctuating U.S. history during the last one hundred years. However, their lives were considerably marked by these events, forcing endless changes for which they were unprepared. Heirs of slaves on the great southern plantations remained dependent on the same large farms, housed and paid in kind in a serfdom of sharecroppers.

Mechanization along with a steady loss of land being farmed impelled these families to move in search of work and housing. From the beginning of the century, some of them migrated together to the Northern cities forming large African-American neighborhoods, or to urban ghettos, like New York's Harlem. But most of the families spread out in a smaller circle from county to county, sometimes from one state to another. Seldom finding stable employment and a better life, they often foundered into a deeper poverty and, in many cases, the family experienced upheaval when one or another member left.

At the same time, the vast urban centers, particularly New York City, attracted and absorbed a dizzying flow of immigrant populations: Irish, Polish, Eastern European Jews, Italians, and other Europeans. For more than a century, New York's Lower East Side played the role of entry port for these streams of immigrants. Its tenements—four to six-story apartment buildings—always welcomed the poor, while those emerging from poverty escaped to other neighborhoods or states. In the '50s and '60s, these apartment buildings became the refuge of national migrants, above all African-Americans and Puerto Ricans, lured by the promise of work and a better life.

These same recent hundred years also witnessed profound modifications in efforts to respond to poverty and exclusion. The initial responses during the last century followed the charity model, often with a work component. But very soon, leadership, stirred by the poverty of urban populations, by racial segregation and labor exploitation, initiated organizations like the Fourth World Movement and founded institutions for the defense of rights, for representation and the social advancement of the poor.

During the Great Depression of the '30s, when one third of the national work force was unemployed, the government launched a series of social measures called the New Deal, most of which continue to exist today, such as Social Security (for the retired) and the allotment to single women caring for children, known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children or welfare. The government entered definitively a sphere until then entirely reserved for private initiative.

The economic recovery during the '40s and the rapid increase of material progress for most citizens in the following decade rendered the poor invisible. Voices had to be raised to denounce the fate of those excluded from progress and to challenge the U.S. to rediscover its poor. In the '60s, reams of literature forced a change of opinion culminating in the African-American struggle for civil rights and the War on Poverty. Several programs opened their doors; some worked for a short time while others are still in place today. They reduced temporarily the number of economically poor, but they touched the poorest only marginally. This period, known as the Great Society, was followed in the '70s by a public lassitude, and the '80s saw a return to laissez-faire politics vis-a-vis poor people and neighborhoods.

A dramatic increase in the number of homeless individuals and families occasioned the rebirth of emergency aid of the charity type which is dependent on mobilizing masses of volunteers. Many projects for the reform of the welfare system were initiated to little avail while impassioned debates focused again on this inadequate, outdated, unpopular system of assistance.

In the '90s, extensive print and media coverage has again zeroed in on poverty. The homeless, women as heads of families, youthful delinquents, teenage mothers, illiteracy, drugs, and AIDS are often lumped together by the media as social problems. This way of reporting about the poor linking poverty, criminality and marginality leads to the notion of an underclass.

Still, through these fluctuations of policy and opinion, some institutions have persisted to accompany the poorest, to make their voices heard, and work on solutions. Once again, religious and moral leaders evoke the humanitarian ethic on which the country was founded and the moral duty to provide a chance for everyone to live with dignity and respect.

* * * * *

EARLY 20TH CENTURY LIFE IN GEORGIA

The first part of this monograph retraces the events of the past as Volunteers have been able to recall them from the conversations they had on several occasions with one or another family member. The account begins with the grandmother of Carrie Robinson who is herself the matriarch of a family group, at the earliest point in the history which she recalled during the conversations.

Carrie Robinson

In speaking of her grandmother who had raised her, Carrie Robinson said, *"When she was born, I don't know. It's been so long. She must have been born right after slavery."* Because Carrie herself was born in 1910, we assume that her grandmother was born shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the only event of national history that Carrie mentioned.

Carrie remembers hearing about her grandmother's hard childhood:

> *She used to tell me about how it was with her when she was growing up. Because her mother died and she lived with somebody—I don't know who—but they were mean to her. She'd be barefoot and didn't have but one or two pieces on, and it'd be so cold; and they'd send her a ways to get something. She'd be so cold she'd rake up pine straw to get warm. And they used to whip her.*

An orphan at seven years old.
Carrie spoke little of her mother, but she often repeated, *"My mother died when I was seven."* The oldest of three children, Carrie lived with them on a big farm in Millen, Jenkins County, in the Georgia countryside that she still calls *"home."* The house, in her words, resembled many others: small, wooden, built on beaten-down earth, with a shingle-top roof, doubtless in bad condition because *"some of them would have shingle tops covered with tin and they held the house together."* She recalls that many of these houses belonged to the *"bossman,"* the owner, on whom everything and everyone depended: the *"many grown-ups and kids"* living and working on the farm. Carrie, born Jones, possessed no birth certificate. The owner recorded births in a notebook. Every 10 years, at the time of the national census, a clerk gave the families a letter attesting to the birth of each child born in that time interval. Such a letter always served Carrie as a birth certificate.

Carrie remembered her mother, weakened by sickness and seated on a rocking chair, calling out what had to be done in the house, *"'Bring in the coal; put it on the stove.'"* Carrie believes she probably felt death coming because, *"she wanted me to learn to cook, so I would learn before she left me. She told me that she wanted me to be a good girl and to meet her in heaven."* This legacy from her mother influenced this seven year-old child so much that at eighty-two, she could say,

> *I want my children to be the same. Now I am raising my great grandchildren. For them I wish the same thing. My mother always taught me to respect peopl . . . that if I was good then everybody would love me. She*

> *wanted me to grow up to be good, to honor all grown folks . . . So I haven't forgot that yet. I always try to treat people right.*

Something else about her mother that Carrie recalled from her early childhood was going to church: *"my mother and my grandmother used to take me to the church, and ever since then I loved it."* When she speaks about the church it's also about one of her uncles. He went to church every Sunday.

> *They ordained him as a deacon. He was good. Everybody loved him . . . The Sunday they buried him, I don't know how many people said something about him. Most got up and spoke something good.*

He is the only man from her childhood she will talk about. Was their life so hard that this made it difficult for people to find good things to say about them? Could this be why being recognized as "honorable" became so important to Carrie?

Separated from her brother and sister.

The shock of her mother's death was very quickly followed by separation from her sister and brother. *"We weren't raised together. I remember when my sister left us; we were all crying. My brother, he was a little bitty, a little new-born baby."* Carrie and her brother met again on one occasion several years later. They did not recognize each other right away. Then people in the area told her it was her brother.

> *And I went to him . . . and asked him, did he know me? And he said, "No!" I said, "You are my brother!" And I never did see him any more. I heard about him; he was dead . . . I cried, really cried.*

Carrie spoke bitterly about this death because nothing is known about the cause. She herself is convinced that he died because of bad treatment by the woman who brought him up:

> *The old lady, she killed him. She hit him in the head—I believe it was with a hammer—and threw him in the well and said he fell in. Her granddaughter told on her, and she kept on and got out of it.*

Three years of school . . . at what a price!

For three years, little Carrie divided her time between the farm where she lived with her grandmother and her aunt and uncle's house in Philadelphia where she was able to attend school.

> *Long when I was going to school, you had to buy books. My grandmother didn't have money . . . I used to stay with them, with my aunt and uncle. My grandmother let me stay with them and go to school. After school closed, that time, I could come back and stay with her some . . . My aunt was not good to me. She had a little girl; she always treated her better than she treated me. She'd go out and buy things for her daughter, Pauline, she'd bring nothing for me. People would ask, "Well, Pauline has such a thing; why don't you have any?" My uncle knew that she wasn't treating me right. I was small then; I was about eight or nine years old. I can still tell. And I would say that when I get grown, I'm not going to mistreat any child.*

But after three years of school, *"My grandmother couldn't send me any longer. I had to work."* Carrie often regrets, *"I didn't even learn nothing,"* or *"I only had three years of school."*

A hard-working childhood.

According to Carrie, the years at her grandmother's on the farm were filled not only with unending work but also with happy memories. With great precision, she described all the details she seemed to know so well: the different work in the field that she joined in, picking cotton, plowing the soil to sow corn, running after the mule, harnessing it, getting on the mule to plow. She spoke of the weariness sowing those " . . . *big, old corn-fields . . . I used to get so tired of walking, and that plow did it, and my feet and ankles paining me."* But she added, *"I always worked when I was small because I liked to work."*

Carrie's grandmother made sure that everyone in the household got enough to eat.

> *We just didn't have any money. We raised our own cows, goats; we had hogs and chickens. We never had to buy meat. We'd have lard; and she'd kill four or five hogs and take the fat. She'd dry it up and have two big cans of lard that would last us till summertime started . . . and then she'd make soap out of it.*

Her grandmother also taught her to make preserves, to mend, to make blankets and patchwork quilts. Women and girls worked together in one house or another.

> *We'd sit up there, sometimes till about midnight. And people would come and help her. Have quilting, and she'd make syrup candy and put peanuts in it. After finishing, they'd have a fire outside and just have a good time. I wouldn't leave her. I would sit right up there with her and thread that needle and we didn't have but lamps.*

All kinds of activities demanded her participation in the struggle for survival, some of them with a bit of pleasure for the children,

> *We used to go to a place about a quarter of a mile from the house. We'd go down there . . . and catch just a string of fishes. We went home and cooked them and had a good time fishing . . . Sometimes my grandmother let us go to parties. And we would have our own parties, sometimes: we'd buy ice, sodas, and sell them.*

Carrie said proudly that she worked as hard as a boy to care for her grandmother. *"Me and my first cousin, we got out there and cut wood . . . I hauled it to keep my grandmother warm. I didn't want her to get cold."*

Her grandmother's lessons included visiting those who were worse off than you.

> *If I knew somebody was sick, or something happened, I would try to find out. I was raised like that . . . There was a lady one time; she was white; she was old; and she couldn't get out the door very much. And my grandmother'd say, "Go over there and see Ms . . . and see how she's feeling, and see if she wants you to do anything. Let me know, and I'll go up there and help you. Take this to her."*

The job hunt.
During all her childhood and adolescence, Carrie's life was spent mainly on farms; she knew work in the fields, housework and community life. When she was about 20, she left the farm, radically changing the rhythm of her life. After her grandmother's death, she decided to move in with her sister from whom she had been separated so long. *"Me and my sister, we said we wouldn't separate, just stay together as long as we lived."*

Were these young women forced to leave the farm as a result of increasing mechanization? Did they follow men who were looking for work and with whom they tried to establish a home? Or were they attracted by the possibility of having a salaried job and thus more independence? Doubtless all these factors played their part. Furthermore, this major change took place at the time of the Great Depression, and looking for work then was often disappointing. But Carrie and her sister, so used to doing household work, had a high trump in the job hunt.

> *I had a job after my grandmother died. When I went to live with my sister. . . At first my sister was cooking at a lady's place, but once she got sick. So her boyfriend, who was also working there, told the lady that he'd bring someone who cooked just as good as her. So he came and got me, and I cooked there until my sister got better.*

It was harder for men to find something besides farm work. They had to move more often and search even farther away and so had difficulty staying with their family.

Carrie's first job was followed by many others, which meant successive moves. She said she had done cooking, housework, taking care of children *"for whites,"* as well as cooking and dishwashing in restaurants with long days of hard poorly-paid work. *"To tell you the truth, I had to work cheap, I mean cheap. . . .Oh Lord! I mean that I worked for nothing!"* She and her sister helped each other in the housing and job search, sometimes sharing the same place or caring for each other's children.

She had eight children between 1930 and 1948 and had to leave one or another in the care of close relatives at various times to look for work and housing. Her second child, William Jones, was born in Philadelphia in 1932. He remembers having been entrusted to a family on a Georgia farm. Then, he says, *"After that, my mother got back in touch with me and brought me to Augusta, Georgia, and that's where I got raised up."*

Carrie remembers these years as a time of exhausting mobility leading to nothing.

> *I had to go someplace, look for a place, keep moving all the time. Every time you're moving, you lose something, like my grandmother said, "A rolling stone don't gather no moss." That's the way it is when you are moving too much: you don't get anything out of it.*

Moving and keeping the family together.
This instability and hard work coupled with the birth of seven children took their toll on her health. She tells about getting sick on the road, *"A lady helped me; when she saw me in this condition, she wanted me to stay, but I didn't want to; I wanted to go home to my sister before dark."*

Children took part in the family's fight to make ends meet. William began to work after school at the age of twelve.

> *I was delivering groceries until 9:00 at night. The last time I went to school, I was in fourth grade. I had to quit school because my mother was ill. Then I started dairying. The dairy was on the edge of the town. And this lady taught me in night school for three dollars a week. She promoted me up to the seventh grade.*

William never remained long enough to really be able to master reading. He often regretted that he couldn't read.

In 1947, the family went back to the farm they had already lived on. Carrie was living with a man named Robinson, father of her two last children, a boy who died a few years later, and Jenny, born in 1948. The father insisted on a legal marriage. Carrie recounts, *"He got the license for marriage without telling me. He wanted to keep me."* Carrie Jones became Carrie Robinson. Still the couple separated just a few months after the birth of Jenny, and they did not keep in touch very much. Jenny only saw her father again two or three times before he died in 1965.

Did Jenny's father leave home in search of better-paying employment? It did not seem that at this time, men were able to find decent jobs that could really support a whole family. Did these men feel humiliated, not being able to be breadwinners? Did they leave, or were they unable to fulfill all their responsibilities as fathers? Did Carrie strike out on her own because she felt freer after raising her children as a single parent for so many years? Even later, Carrie rarely spoke in a positive way about the men around her. In her eyes, parties were times that had to be cut short before the young men got out of line and *"looked for a fight."*

In contrast, William reported in detail the important role of older men in the children's education on the farm. *"You had to respect them,"* said William. As an example, he drew upon an incident which left him with a searing memory even fifty years later.

> *Everyone called my grandfather's brother-in-law "Old Man." One day, I came to see him on my grandfather's mule, and I called him "Old Man." He took a stick and beat me. I ran away screaming to my grandfather. I thought he would take it out on Mister Johnny. But, when he heard what happened, he gave me another whipping, saying, "Just let me catch you again calling him Old Man! You must call him Uncle Johnny."*

William and May Jones

Teenagers together on the farm.
At sixteen, William Jones had already gained broad experience in the world of work. He described his daily schedule on the farm.

> *I would have to get up some mornings at 2:00 o'clock to milk cows. Then instead of going back to bed, I had to get that tractor and work. Sometimes I had to work until 3:00 [pm] and then come in to milk the cows. Sometimes I'd get off at 6:00 o'clock and go home. The next morning at 2:00, I would go back milking. I wasn't making any money.*

In 1948, he met May, younger by two years, whose family experience, like his own, consisted exclusively of living and working on the farm. Speaking about her parents and grandparents, May stated, *"Everybody was born on the farm, and they died on the farm.*

They didn't move." May was born in the house of her grandmother who raised her because her mother worked in the owners' house. *"My mother, she cooked for them for eighteen years. She was a cook up until she passed away."* This proximity to the owners' house gave a slightly privileged status to May's family, although like the other families, they lived in a situation of almost total dependence. *"We were working for some white folk . . . They had all the farm and the people, and they had houses for the people that all worked,"* said May, explaining that there were some 150 houses.

May's father left for New York when she was only one year old. He remarried but kept contact with his daughter. *"When it was time for me to go to school, he would send me boxes of clothes, all my school clothes, and things like that,"* said May, noting that he worked for fifteen years repairing highways. May, being the oldest in a family where other children would be born, recalls often that she was raised by her grandmother and that her mother was like a big sister for her.

As a child, May was not forced to work. However, she followed the others.

> *I would just go with them, because I didn't have to work. But I never was a person that just wanted to sit down . . . They cut one little hoe off. I was so little I could chop off the end of the row of the cotton.*

May's upbringing was strict.

> *I never went out; I went to church and school . . . My granddaddy was a deacon. When we did something wrong, other parents would whip us, and that was it . . . I was whipped by my parents, my neighbors, and everybody. We had strict parents.*

When asked what they were strict about, May replied, *"climbing trees, cussing, bothering older people in their homes, and throwing things."*

From about the age of eleven or twelve, she took care of the bosses' children outside of school hours. Gradually, while continuing to help on the farm, she served as the maid of one or another of the young women she called *"Miss Sheila, Miss Kate"*; she traveled with them on vacations. She retained happy memories of the places she visited and discovering new ways of doing things. *"The whites are smart. They take their children to places. They show them things; they speak to them so they know."*

A new family.

William recalled, *"In '48, I met May. We were kids together on the farm. In 1950, we started courting and then we were married ever since."* May remembered,

> *William was driving a John Deere tractor, and then I was picking cotton . . . We were working together, and we'd go to church together. He'd take me to the movie . . . to the plays . . . and bring me back on time . . . Everywhere I would get, he would get. So that's how we married, I guess. We were married in '51 . . . I was still in school. You'd be ashamed if you got pregnant . . . I liked school . . . and then I stopped . . .*

May added that the young man responsible was supposed to marry the woman who became pregnant.

"It turned everything around," continued May. *"I was born in my grandmother's house. I married out of the house in '51."* At seventeen, May entered the Jones-Robinson family although most of the young people who set up a family without legally marrying usually resided in the young woman's family. May felt close to her mother-in-law:

> *I never had any problems like some sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law do. We get along because she knows my whole family, she knows me. I really grew up with her. I married her son . . . We all used to do farm work together.*

Daily life took on many new forms for May during the following seventeen years. Nine children were born, one of whom died. Still, farm life meant a bitter struggle for the husband and wife to have enough to survive.

For his work on the farm, even with a double shift, William noted, *"I wasn't making any money."* May began to work in the fields in addition to the house work,

> *I'd take my baby in the fields, and make shade . . . I bought a big wagon and put the baby in there where he could sleep . . . When I would go home to cook, I used to take everything and bring it back after. It was hard, believe me!*

Some work pained her more than others,

> *. . . working all day and half the night. The stuff got ripe in July, and you are trying to fill up the barn with tobacco. You have to go all day until 11 o'clock at night. When people smoke a cigarette, they don't think about all the work behind it.*

She speaks of the crushing heat, her body aching everywhere, not being able to sleep at night because of the aches. In addition, she began to have asthma, a sickness several of her children would suffer from also and which would force her to the hospital several times.

In 1954, William tried to leave farm work when a chance came for a job on the railroad. But it was just as demanding without any better pay,

> *That railroad was something! Cross ties, putting the tracks down! You should have seen my back! . . . . The rain would stop and then with the heat it would blister. It was hard work. And my check was about 35 dollars.*

The evolution of farm work.

In 1959, William returned to farm work although the pay was still far from enough to raise his family, *"My best day was $6 a day . . . In '65, we had the great President Kennedy, and he got for us a minimum wage of $1.25 an hour."*

President Kennedy died in 1963. Still, William, who does not often talk about political events or people, gives him credit for a law benefiting everyone struggling to make ends meet. Families like the Jones frequently told Fourth World Volunteers about the respect and admiration they felt for everything surrounding President Kennedy's memory. After 1968, Volunteers often saw, displayed in their homes, an embroidery picturing President Kennedy, his brother Bobby and Martin Luther King Jr., side by side. The only decoration on the time-worn walls, the art work symbolized the hope that these people represented for the poor.

Whatever else could be said, with this new law, William could finally pressure his boss.

> *The man didn't give me the whole price. He gave me $1.20. Then I quit working with him. I went to where my daughter lived, and they gave me $1.25. The boss I had left gave me that other nickel to come back and work with him. I just refused to go back to milking cows. I just made eight hours a day. That was 10 dollars a day.*

William was proud of saying that he was valued for his work, and that he knew how to repair the tractor while others only knew how to drive, *"I could nearly make one with some wrenches and things."*

In spite of the hard life of those years on the farm, May later talked about them *as "the good old days."* Here she meant relationships among people: *"We picked beans and peas. If someone was sick-we'd take it to their house and give it to their kids. It was tomatoes and all off the farm."* She spoke of families who had a harder life than hers, *"big families, eight or nine children, and no husband. The only help was your hands."*

Jenny Robinson

"Once I get old enough to leave, I'm leaving."

During the years when William and May Jones struggled to establish and raise their family on the farm, William's mother, Carrie, who still had children to care for, continued looking for work. Her youngest child, Jenny, told of hard times,

> *We did a lot of moving when I was growing up, but it was basically around the same kind of area . . . It was like trying to find a better life . . . It was really, really hard . . . Sometimes we didn't go to school because half the time I didn't have shoes to wear . . . So I had to give up school, try to work . . . I didn't attend eighth grade. I said, "Once I get old enough to leave. I'm leaving," because I was really tired.*

Jenny and her sisters mostly took care of children or did housework.

> *We were working and they weren't paying anything. I had quite a few jobs. And the only two that paid were when I was working in a restaurant and the other one when I was working in a bakery.*

Carrie stayed head of the family:

> *I didn't have anything. I'd work but I couldn't buy clothes. I had to buy groceries and buy shoes on credit; sometimes I wouldn't be able to pay it all at once.*

Like many others, the family entered a market economy. In reaction to information from many sources, households' needs changed. Still it was hard for people who were earning very little. In fact they were unable to afford all these new products of the consumers' society. Jenny's mother tried to get a television set; it was taken back before they could pay for it; the electricity was cut off. The humiliation that followed made a deep impression on Jenny.

The dream becomes clear.

In the sixties, the country was growing and changing. New opportunities and challenges opened up. People felt greater freedom to move and to try new experiences. Several members of the family had already ventured to New York: May's father in 1935 and Carrie's oldest daughter in 1953. *"She lives in the suburbs and married a Spanish guy."* Another of Carrie's daughters left for Florida, leaving her two children with Carrie.

Young people no longer accepted rural life when another possibility appeared. May told of her young sixteen year-old sister:

> *Everybody was working in the fields . . . she said she wasn't picking any cotton. It was too hard and the sun was too hot. But we stayed on and picked cotton. She came to New York.*

She followed the job offers to young women through the agency ads in the paper: jobs for maids.

As for Carrie, she also reached her limits:

> *I was working on the farm, and this man was driving me crazy. He was always watching if I was doing anything, if I was sitting down, or where I was going. I cleaned the house, the horses; he'd say, "want you and the young ones to come over and pull some weeds for me." He'd pay me fifty cents an hour.*

Later she realized that he was violating a law she was unaware of then. He never contributed for her to the government fund, and she will be without a pension in her old age: *"I said to myself, one of these days, this is going to be over."*

NEW YORK

Jenny Robinson

The great exodus *"for a better life."*

Jenny's words:

> *I had the same life as my mother. That's why I left, for a better life . . . It was the dream of coming to New York. I used to see pictures of New York. I thought those buildings were the greatest and the most beautiful. Some of my friends came . . . They said they were going to live here where they were going to make their home, their life. I thought that I was going to try it.*

How many times have we heard this same dream expressed by families struggling with the hardships of New York? How closely it echoes immigrants' voices from other countries in generations past! One day, the great exodus comes about. Often, it is the young, the best prepared, or simply the boldest, who leave. Some, like May's sister, find the way to a better life; others continue to look for a light at the end of the tunnel; others finally drown in the poverty of the cities. Few of them escape.

In 1966, eighteen-year-old Jenny took the decisive step that brought the family along the same path.

> *They had an ad in the paper. And I had to fill it out and send to the agency. They sent the ticket right down. When I got to the bus station in New York, they picked me up . . . They took me to the places where I was going to be working.*

The shock of arrival was a stinging blow:

> *Everybody down South was speaking about New York like it was heaven on earth. When I arrived at Port Authority, I couldn't believe it: noisy, dirty! And I saw those bottles and other things around there . . . I was able to cope with it, because I was in search of a better life.*

The ads and the employment agencies were a risk; the ticket, one-way; the jobs, short term. Many girls found themselves on the street after a few weeks, just like many men from Puerto Rico drawn by similar ads for farm work. They received a one-way ticket, unaware that the job was temporary. Many families were broken up, since the man could not return. Not having earned enough to bring his family, he often ended up living with another family.

Jenny found herself with a job as a maid for eight days in a little town north of New York, at the home of a small shopkeeper. By luck, she got another housework job in the same town for two or three months. Then, she managed to get to the agency that brought her, and they secured another job for her in New York City: *"I was getting jobs here and there. The hardest thing was finding an apartment."*

Of course, money had to be set aside to pay the month's rent in advance. This was difficult for these young people who, housed and fed as a maid, earned very little. But Jenny had a goal: to bring her mother here. She had to have an apartment, which she finally acquired on a Lower East Side street where girl friends from Georgia lived.

It was in this neighborhood that several programs in the War on Poverty saw the light of day, particularly "Mobilization for Youth" or MFY, which offered training to young people. Many never finished the training. Some received diplomas without any subsequent job opening. Jenny followed a beautician's training program for four months in one of these programs.

Jenny introduces her mother.
"After I got my apartment, in another six or seven months, or so," Jenny recounts, *"I sent for my mother to come up with the rest of the family."* Without any hesitation, Carrie decided to "go up" to New York with three of her two daughters' children, the oldest of whom, Christine, was six. This was in September 1968. Carrie was happy to play a trick on the man she had been working for:

> *I told him that I won't be working tomorrow because I'm fixing to move. "Where you going?" I said, "To New York!" He told my son that I wasn't going to like it up there, and that I would be back, but I never did. Why go back there now? It might be worse. I'll never go back to work for him.*

Jenny lived then in three rooms which meant, in that neighborhood, entry into a kitchen with a bathtub next to the sink, a small room on a dark court between two apartment buildings almost touching each other, and another room overlooking the street. Some apartment buildings still had the toilet on the landing; others, at the end of the room in a kind of closet. This was the place these two women and three children called home for about a year until Carrie could get her own apartment.

The joy of being with her daughter, who welcomed her with open arms and the little she had, did not free Carrie from the fear of finding herself in a completely unfamiliar environment:

> *Jenny would tell me about those dope addicts. I didn't know what it was. I was scared. She was working and it would be sometimes late before she'd come home. She told me not to wait up for her, what lock to leave open. But I locked myself in and, watching out the window, waited for her, and unlocked the door when she came in. The children would be sleeping.*

Her own apartment.
Jenny encouraged her mother to begin the steps to get the public assistance that was her right. At that time it was easier for women with children to get allotments and help. Many neighborhood organizations focused on helping poor families, and the city administration was favorable. The bi-monthly welfare check was inadequate to live on but sufficient to survive on. Families could receive in addition a housing allotment equal to the rent, which the owners had learned to fix at the maximum possible amount allowed by the government for the number of children in the family. In addition, the families were entitled to free medical care, which, with the food vouchers, could be a basis of minimal security.

Carrie arrived in New York a few months before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Later, she admits with some regret that she did not know of him. *"I was so poor; I didn't have a TV or anything."* But she saw people buying his pictures and records, and she did the same to discover that he said and did important things for the country.

Carrie brings William and May Jones.
May and William link their coming to New York to the fact that Carrie Robinson, William's mother, encouraged them to join her: *"She kept telling us . . .we could do better."* Also, May was told that it would relieve her asthma. Carrie managed to send money for the trip, and May came with her four youngest children; the oldest was eight years old and the youngest, less than two. *"The first weeks, we stayed up with my father in the Bronx."* (He had been in this neighborhood north of New York City for 35 years, working on the highways, and they had maintained contact.)

William continued working to pay for the trip and came later to New York with the other three children who were still with him in Georgia (the oldest, having already started his own family, remained in Georgia). He arrived with seven dollars in his pocket. His wife, May, remembers, *"Then I went to Carrie's apartment. William, all the children and I stayed with his mother until we found a place."*

What a challenge that must have been for these two families—three adults and ten children—to live so crowded together, even if only temporarily! William and May walked the streets to find an apartment: *"Every day we were just walking, looking for an apartment. We got up early, put the children in school, and asked people everywhere if they had an apartment."*

At that time and for the next several years, two families in an apartment was considered an emergency. So the Robinsons probably obtained a housing allotment to pay for their rent. They found an apartment on 4th Street through people on the street, as Jenny had done.

"When I got there," noted William, *"I met a lot of people from Georgia, and a lot of them knew me."*

Finding familiar faces did not lessen the apprehension:

> *I was scared. I had never seen so many people, so many illegal things going on. I wanted to go back to Georgia. I stuck with it ever since then and we made it.*

They got welfare for a short time, probably with Jenny's know-how because William says,

> *I never heard of welfare until I came to New York City . . . When I got to know the area a little bit, after about two weeks, I bucked the welfare and went to work.*

The neighborhood economy.
For the following nine years, William always retained a job. He secured employment more readily than other neighborhood men because he demonstrated some skill as a mechanic and already had experience other than farm work. He was hired successively in three neighborhood small businesses: furniture moving, housing repairs and heating repairs.

Inner-city neighborhoods were characterized by these small enterprises, most often managed only by the boss and one or two men as helpers. Neighborhood residents and apartment owners required their services for many necessary repairs, because of the run-down condition of the buildings and the frequent moves of the tenants. Prices as well as employees' wages were often decided by individual bargaining.

This person-to-person way of buying and selling also operated in neighborhood stores. These occupied the ground floor of many of the apartment buildings, mostly on the avenues, perpendicular to the streets, in this neighborhood designed in squares. The families paid a higher price here for their necessities than they would at the supermarkets. They preferred these small stores because they were close by and the storekeepers who lived there knew them well. So, just as in a country village, a child could be sent to go shopping, buy in bulk and, above all, request and sometimes obtain credit.

This self-sufficient neighborhood system suited May, since there was no need to venture out into the frightening city. Everything, in fact, appeared very strange to her:

> *Here, you speak to people. They look at you like you were crazy. I said "Good morning"; they answer, "What's good about it?" So I stopped . . . When we came here we had to lock the doors, you stay home.*

In fact even the children noticed, *"Our mother never goes anywhere."* She was aware of it herself: *"I don't go out very often. I had to stay home with the kids."*

The first months, May recognizes, she did not have the heart to take up her usual activities outside of the kitchen, such as starting some sewing again. She wondered even if she would stay. She confided to a Fourth World Volunteer, *"I hoped to find work, but you never know what is going to happen if you go out. Even if you lock your door, people break in."*

Housing hell.
A few months after they arrived in New York, between 1966 and 1970, Jenny Robinson, her mother (Carrie Robinson), and William and May Jones had each found a place to stay in the

same neighborhood on the Lower East Side. During the 1970s, the three families, among thousands of others, lived a real "housing hell."

Most of the neighborhood apartments dated from the beginning of the century. Plumbing, electricity and heating improvements had been installed here and there to meet the minimum level of modern living. But this was mostly makeshift repair work. Furthermore, these dwellings offered no security to the tenants. The owners rented preferably to families receiving government support because the rent was thus guaranteed, and there was hardly any control on housing conditions. The time came when the profit margin was minimal and sometimes even negative. This prompted the owners to try to get rid of their apartment buildings as fast as possible, either by selling them for almost nothing to unsuspecting tenants or simply by abandoning them. The result was the same in both cases. The city had to take over these undesirable apartment buildings although it lacked the determination and the financial capacity to manage them.

"*I can say that I have lived in some really terrible places,*" recalled Carrie. She described an apartment "*with holes as big as your head*" through which the rats came in. She was relocated by the owner to another apartment, equally awful. She spoke of having gone on a "rent strike." These strikes were encouraged and supported by the neighborhood community organizations as a way to pressure the owners who did not make necessary repairs or provide heat. The families had to turn over their rent in escrow until their cause was settled satisfactorily. Many of them yielded to the temptation to use this money for other things or put it aside for moving, without going through the legal channels. As for Carrie, she kept her money at home in an envelope and used it to relocate to similar housing in the same neighborhood.

Jenny and her first daughter, Sue, had an apartment in the same building as her mother, Carrie, when a fire broke out. All their possessions were stolen when they were moved into a Red Cross temporary shelter. For three months, the two families lived in a "Welfare Hotel."

The city sub-contracted with old hotels to shelter needy, homeless families: one family in each room, no private sanitary facilities, and no possibilities of cooking. Furthermore, the families were often far from their own neighborhood where they had to go to see other family members and friends, often to get meals, and to leave the children with someone reliable in order to accomplish necessary errands. Some families preferred to leave their children in their former school to avoid a change, but school attendance was adversely affected.

Staying in these hotels always remained a horrible memory for the families who experienced it. "*They were bad months,*" said Carrie. "*There was a man killed there, when I was there; we were afraid. I would never want to live through that again.*"

As for May and William, they stayed in the same 4th Street building while the street deteriorated rapidly. Between 1970 and 1976, practically all the buildings were set on fire at least once; some families continued living in buildings where almost all the other apartments were vacated. Empty buildings attracted young people and drug addicts as squatters, while other places were completely demolished.

When families from the country, like the Joneses, arrived in neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, they looked with a certain amount of fear on the fourteen-story towers bordering the neighborhood along the river. They seemed like cities in themselves, and these high buildings, where all the tenants depended on one elevator, appeared even more dangerous than their own. Some families preferred to live in four- or six-story buildings without an elevator.

Still, some neighborhood families, victims of fire and ex-tenants of "Welfare Hotels," were relocated in these towers or similar complexes. Fear of living there persisted, only overcome by the dread of increasingly frequent fires. Families began to sign up on the waiting list for what they called a "project."

May continued to be afraid for the children who were growing up: *"In New York, children fight with their teachers . . . They start on drugs, and they go to prison."*

"It's no good raising little kids here."

Like many parents suddenly confronted by rough, urban neighborhoods, May and William felt that their children, and especially the teenagers, were escaping their control. The parents were unsure in these new situations: *"You have to be very strict in New York. I have to keep the girls together; they are hard. Down home you got a good beating, but here you can't spank the children; people say that it's abuse."* One day, May told a Volunteer that the children couldn't go out, *"Their father said 'no' as a punishment because they ask for too much."*

She made sure that they were on time at school, and she accompanied the little ones to the pre-school program, Head Start. This program, with its goal of preparing disadvantaged children for elementary school, had been created by the War on Poverty. The poorest families hesitated to send their children there because they feared the children were too young to be away from home. Generally these families waited until attendance at school was compulsory before undertaking any of the necessary preparations. But May was anxious to register and introduced her children to Head Start. *"I walked the two little ones for three years to Head Start, picked them up at 12:00, and took them right back. Then I walked some more friends."*

May worried because her children were not very happy in school for the time being. One of her daughters complained that she had no friends. *"The teachers were calling because the kids were in trouble; they skipped school."* She added that it was a *"real hard job"* to try to keep up with what the children were doing.

Always with William's consent, May exerted every effort so that the children could leave the city for vacations. Many parents hesitated to send their children to camp because they were afraid that something would happen to their children, that the children would not enjoy the opportunity, or that they would not have all the things they needed. But May always managed to find a camp for her children, mostly so that they would be away from New York in the summer: *"I kept them away from 4th Street! With drugs, fights in the parks, robberies, kids setting fires! I packed their bags, and the last day of school, they'd go to stay the whole month."*

Although she didn't go out much in the beginning, May relied on available resources, including Fourth World Volunteers with whom she *"got real close"* to enable her children to explore the world beyond the neighborhood. With William's consent, May allowed the children to go to the Fourth World library and drop-in center.

Risking for others.

But even from the window of her apartment, she looked out over the world with compassion. One day, she called the attention of a Volunteer to an elderly man walking on the other side of the street. He was having trouble walking. *"Someone should help him. He'll never make it alone. There should be people who take care of folks like him."*

In fact, as soon as she realized that the neighborhood organization in the apartment building opposite hers was recruiting volunteers to help distribute food, she offered her assistance:

> *I did it for eight years. I can't believe what I did for free! I grew up like that. My father and my grandmother were that way. They would fill the wagon with things they grew. We'd go pass it out to people who had a lot of kids.*

And, like all the mothers around her with teenaged children, May gave hospitality to couples who were getting together and to their children. In the first years, May and William's oldest boy Ernie's girl-friend and their baby were often at her house. Still, she disapproved of this, often insisting that it was their life, their children and their job to raise them.

May was even slow in finding her way to church, although she gave it high priority. *"First, I had to know where I was going in this neighborhood."*

Doreen Jones

Teenagers in New York.

The Jones children were among those who frequented the Fourth World Movement's cultural center[2] most regularly. They felt at home there and joined in the activities. Like all the older sisters, Doreen came often, holding the smallest one by the hand or carrying her little brother on her hip. She demonstrated great kindness to the smallest children. Spontaneously, Doreen, herself only eleven years old, attended to the young children at the center, seating them and distributing material to them.

Over the months, however, she changed in her ways. Her language showed more clearly the influence both of school and what some call "the Street." She became bolder, more independent and aggressive. One Volunteer observed,

> The children play school. Doreen is the teacher. She puts the wooden boxes in front of the blackboard, sets up a table for herself, lines the children up, makes them sit down, hands out paper, speaks in an authoritarian way, picks up the copies abruptly, constantly shouts "shut up." When she is asked to make less noise, she says, *"The teacher can scream."* A boy asked if he could be the principal. Doreen said, *"No, you are a child,"* and sent him to the corner with his face to the wall.

As she grew, her attitude alternated between what the new environment taught her and what her family passed on as values and ways of doing things. On one occasion, when the drop-in center opened to the community, Doreen, thirteen years old, was there. A young Puerto-Rican neighbor, a mother of four children, appeared very lost. She was out on the street after a fight with her husband. Doreen consoled her with tender gestures and the authority of a woman. She said, *"Don't worry; it'll be all right."* She left, to return a few minutes later with two black women, one of whom carried a baby in her arms, and she said, *"You can go stay with them; they have a big place. Don't worry; another time, they may need you."*

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[2] Cultural center, see glossary.

Entering adolescence, Doreen, like other young people her age, spent more time in the street with her fellow teenagers. She became inseparable from two Puerto-Rican girls. She appeared to be increasingly in opposition to her parents, especially her father: *"We are both Aquarians, and we fight all the time."*

The leader of her younger sisters, Doreen seemed to have many skills. For example, Sandra, three years younger, decided to cut out some pants but gave up. Doreen took on the job, cut the cloth, basted it, and gave it back to Sandra to finish.

Doreen and her two friends often went to the Fourth World drop-in center. When they turned sixteen, their friendship extended to a young mother of two children. They requested a vacation together in Vermont with the Volunteers. Beginning with the five-hour mini-bus ride, Doreen showed she knew how to take care of children, especially the baby. She held him and calmed him when he cried. In fact she spoke and acted as if she were already a woman.

For three days, she easily mixed with the others, but she could also remain alone. If her friends repeated stories of horror films, she advised them to speak in Spanish. She adjusted more easily than the others to the activities at the farm-school where they were on vacation. The first to ride horseback without a saddle, she stayed on the longest, clearly comfortable there. She accepted the music that the farm youngsters played, although it was completely different from what the 4th Street kids ordinarily heard. She said that she would like to attend this school and, when it was time to leave, she spontaneously hugged the director's wife. However, on the last day, she complained of asthma and confessed that she missed her family, especially her little brother and her nephews.

Carlos.
Even before the Vermont vacation, it was clearly understood among the 4th Street gang, known as "The Cobra," that Doreen had grown attached to Carlos. A year her senior and a Puerto-Rican, he lived on the same street and was part of the gang that formed in his street. In the evening, the 4th Street kids often hung out in the playground across from the drop-in center, which most of them attended. Carlos lived with his father who was bringing up his three children alone; an older sister was in Connecticut. They had moved from Puerto Rico when Carlos was thirteen. The father, a shy man, only spoke Spanish; of the three teenagers, only the daughter could manage in English; the boys had learned only the basics.

One of the Volunteers had accompanied several 4th Street youths on their job hunt. As soon as they heard anything about a job possibility or some paid training, the kids spread the word. In February 1975, a training program notified the Volunteers that several young people could be taken. One of them who was concerned observed that Carlos was also looking for a job. When Carlos went for the interview, he was given a form that he could not read. He was told that he could not be accepted because at least a fourth-year reading level was required. When he came back, Carlos was very disappointed and told a Volunteer,

> *I should have gone to school. In Puerto Rico, I didn't go to school a lot. When we got here, I asked to be put in with younger kids, but I was in the 7th grade. So I stopped going. There are a lot of guys selling drugs because they can't find work.*

In fact, a few weeks later, he was home with two other guys making marijuana cigarettes. One of them commented, *"You can't find work. So this is what I do. A guy gives me 'grass' (marijuana leaves). I cut it, I roll it, I give them back (the cigarettes), and he gives me almost no money."* So he described the first cycle of drugs that many young people entered when they dropped out of school and their job hunt led nowhere. Only rarely do these young people with minimal school skills succeed in finding employment.

In 1975, Carlos was arrested several times for marijuana possession. When the girls came back from Vermont, someone told Doreen that Carlos had been arrested. She said, *"They won't let him out if his father doesn't go there, and his father doesn't speak English well. Someone should go with him."* This motivated a Volunteer to contact Carlos' father on a regular basis. Carlos was released and placed on probation for three years.

Hope.
At the same time, it was no longer a secret to anyone on the street that Doreen was pregnant, and one of her friends was also. The rhythm of their lives scarcely changed, and they stuck closely to the gang. Toward the end of the year, the others said that Doreen was worried about Carlos, and she cried every day.

The day the baby was born, in January 1976, Carlos radiated joy. He bought and distributed pink-ribboned cigars as was customary for a daughter's birth. He brought the good news to the Volunteers. When one of them congratulated him and reminded him this meant an important responsibility, Carlos smiled and said, *"I know."*

In the neighborhood hospital, Doreen received visits from the gang, and they admired the baby. One of them revealed to Doreen that Carlos had just been arrested again. She became livid. She got up out of bed, left the others in her room, met the Volunteers in the corridor, and asked them to take care of Carlos, and keep her informed. His father must be notified, and his sister could help him translate to English. She then told them about the birth and how the baby was premature by a month. She had to be anesthetized, and when she was asked to name the baby, not being quite conscious, she had given her own. But both Carlos and she had wanted to give the baby its father's last name. Doreen asked if it would be hard to change the baby's name. But because their life was so chaotic, they never managed to do it. As Doreen's explained, her face fell: *"We had some papers for that, but I lost them."* What a start in life for the baby!

When she left the hospital, Doreen and the baby moved in with her parents. Doreen often visited the center with the baby, who was coddled by everyone. Carlos, in jail, waited for sentencing. His father had to ask for help to visit him. He had to take three different buses, and it could be a long wait between. It was also difficult to get around without knowing English. He came back from the visit with the message that Carlos wanted a picture of Doreen and the baby. Doreen hoped that he would be released for her birthday, February 5th. She went to visit him in prison, although this meant a long, tiring trip. Carlos asked her to bring the baby to the hearing so he could see her.

A Volunteer attended the hearing with Carlos' father and had to insist that the man be informed of what was taking place. He found it difficult to understand that the judge, the legal-aid lawyer and someone from the school system were consulting among themselves in private, and he was very suspicious and worried.

A drug detoxification program was prescribed for Carlos because he had become an addict. Doreen did her best to visit him while he was in the program, despite the travel inconveniences and costs. She returned to school, placing the baby with her mother. *"My mother told me to go back to school, that she would take care of the baby."* Carlos also took courses in the rehabilitation program. He trained as a tailor and planned to go with Doreen and the baby to his sister in Connecticut when he got out of jail: *"I like Connecticut; it's like the country. It's quiet over there."*

But the detoxification program closed for lack of funding before he had completed his time. The counselor assigned to supervise him while he was on probation sent him to another center that refused to accept him, claiming that his level of English was not adequate. He was back on the street in the same vicious circle. He continued the job hunt, but when he was finally hired, after many fruitless attempts, he was laid off a week later. No one had told him that he was just a substitute.

The dream and reality.

At that time, Doreen, Carlos and several other young people were preparing a slide show on their life and their hopes. It was their contribution to the European Assembly of the Fourth World Youth. Their view of their own life was clear: they longed for change, but already one sensed a certain fatalism.

> *We, the youth, we know, of course, that drugs are bad. But we're not the ones who bring them into the neighborhood . . . We would like to go back to school, but you need money to live. It's better to sell drugs than to steal.*

During the summer, the young couple enjoyed a short break. They could live as a family for a few days on another Vermont vacation. They hesitated at first about going. Doreen would agree only if she was sure that Carlos could come; and Carlos would agree only when he had gotten some money *" . . . so I can buy milk for the baby."* Both of them benefited a lot from the vacation; they really appreciated an environment that recalled their childhood in the country. One evening at dusk, Carlos looked at the mountain and said, *"That's beautiful just like in P.R. (Puerto Rico). From my father's house, you could see the mountain, one light here, one light there. It's so beautiful."* Doreen was able to give her entire attention to Carlos and the baby. She was relaxed and seemed happy when she was with the two of them. However, when they were going back, she became sad again and tense as she often was on the street.

A few days later, the three of them were at the Fourth World Movement's drop-in center. Carlos was very tender with Doreen. He played with the baby; he hugged Doreen and said that they would get married. However, he was high.

The new family breaks up.

The same summer, Carlos' father, not knowing how to protect his children from this "filth" (as he called drugs), moved to a small town in New Jersey. Carlos joined him two months later, and Doreen announced that they were no longer together. Moreover, she was discouraged by her classes: *"I'm not learning anything at all; the classes are stupid."* She added that the teachers were late or didn't show up, so the students would wander around or go to a play room.

Several times, she traveled with the baby to see Carlos in New Jersey. Carlos' father provided for his family in the attic of a former one-family house in a ramshackle neighborhood. The owner had divided the house into several apartments. The facilities were rudimentary. Voices could be heard from one floor to another, *"Downstairs they are so noisy, I can't even watch TV,"* remarked Carlos' sister. *"My father was sick; I had to tell them to make less noise."* In spite of the small dimensions of the place, Carlos' family invited Doreen and the baby to stay, but she rejected the offer. She gave no reasons for this refusal, but to accept implied a significant adjustment for her. She would be far from her own family and friends in conditions even more insecure and with a family where no one spoke English regularly.

The "street" wins out.

A quarter of a century after her mother, May, gave birth to her first child, Doreen found herself confronting an entirely different world. The moral principles with which May had been brought up and which had dictated in part her decision to marry legally no longer were relevant in the street scene. *"You bring up your children and you see the city take them from you,"* commented a father in the same neighborhood at that time, expressing what so many teenagers' parents felt.

Even if Carlos and Doreen were not married, they took living together and being parents very seriously. But young couples who were forming in such an unfavorable environment found themselves without the means of strengthening the ties in their budding family. Staying together, in spite of love for each other and the child, was rare. Finally they separated.

The welfare dilemma.

Everyone—from parents themselves to welfare administrators—was always divided about showing who the father of a child was, because these teenagers, without skills, were often employed in temporary jobs. If they were recognized as the father, their earnings were taken into account by welfare. They could receive a supplemental assistance from welfare, but they had constantly to take steps to revise the supplemental assistance. Consequently many young women preferred to declare themselves heads of the family. This did not help either to reinforce the parents' attempts to live as a family or to ensure that they were respected as a family by the rest of society. Did these young men find the right conditions to be able to take on responsibility for their family?

In 1976, during their monthly meetings at the Fourth World house in New York, adults and young people talked about the effects of the welfare system on their family life. *"I can't say anything against welfare; they provide for my children." "You're ashamed to receive the check, but you can't do anything else." "The children don't respect their father any more; he's not the one who feeds them." "With welfare, you can't get out of it, you're stuck."*

A few years later, Sandra Jones observed, *"welfare isn't for girls our age. People like my mother (May), okay; she has asthma, she can't work. But for girls like us we can put our kids in a daycare and go to work."* Saying this, she expressed the feeling of shame that these young people felt in the public assistance cycle.

But in fact, many young women like Doreen who became mothers had no choice but to get into the system unless they stayed with their own mothers, went to school, and got a good paying job. Indeed, work was no more available for young women without school diplomas than for their male counterparts. Moreover, admission to daycare centers, so inadequate in number, was accorded first to children whose mothers were employed.

All the children did not turn out the same way.

The drug scene was becoming a real trap for many teenagers. And Doreen was caught in it. This situation was increasingly painful for May. Over the years, as many other parents did, she would continue to bear this suffering in silence. She would comment from time to time, *"When they start on drugs, they lose everything, wives, family."* But her door stayed opened and all her children were welcomed, Doreen and the others. For her, *"They are all different. They find their own way of getting along."*

FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD TO THE ANONYMOUS CITY

A stranger in her own city.
Something that had never happened before coming to the big city occurred for the first time in these awesome surroundings. In 1977, May saw William being arrested for a fight. On the way to court, May said that her family never had any trouble with "The Law." She was completely surprised seeing a new part of New York for the first time. She exclaimed over the size and beauty of the Brooklyn Bridge. *"For months, the only place I knew was the store. Maybe that's why I stayed in 4th Street so long; I didn't know anything better. The children learned their way faster."*

In court, she experienced a completely foreign world. She had to try to understand the bureaucratic complexities on which the result of the accusation depended. William was not present because, after complaining of pain in his arm, he had been taken to the hospital for observation. The hearing had to be postponed; the arresting officer had to be located and, with the legal-aid lawyer, he had to appear at a new hearing. It took three days to settle a case that everyone had hoped would be dropped. In the meantime, the neighborhood men convinced William's assailant to withdraw his charge. Without the solidarity of the 4th Street men, the result could have been very different.

Long months waiting.
In March 1977, May said that she did not think she would be accepted into the project because she had too many children. Indeed, fewer apartments were available for big families, and the waiting lists were much longer. A housing application was good only for two years. If it was not filled, it had to be resubmitted. Some big families had to make as many as six consecutive applications before securing an apartment. May dreamed of finding a house to rent in Queens, a section of New York with a large number of private houses that is, in general, not so poor.

In June, May did not send the children to camp because she wanted to move *"as soon as school is over. I have things packed. I can't wait to move."* She did not dare leave the apartment for fear of robberies.

However, at Christmas, they were still there. *"A lot of people aren't paying their rent any more. There is hardly any heat in the building. The family is in different places for Christmas."*

In July 1978, the owner of the building died. His son *". . . didn't want to do anything about the building."* The city claimed it. A neighborhood man became the manager and offered William the job of janitor. That meant mostly cleaning and taking care of the heat and urgent repairs. The whole family helped out. *"When we came up from the South,"* May remembered,

> *. . . some friends from down home were doing this. They said that you don't pay rent because of the work you do. But it's not worth the time. I didn't know it was so hard. It's one of the worst jobs I've ever had. Never again, never.*

William explained that *". . . the guy who had the building cut all the wires and the fuel pipes going to the boiler because no one was paying rent. The city won't probably fix it. Nothing can be done."* A few days later, May announced she had paid an agency to find her an apartment. *"People are stripping the back, empty apartments of plumbing fixtures and pipes."*

A few days to relax.

May was at the end of her rope, and so she agreed to take advantage of a weekend in the country with another family and some Volunteers, but William had to take care of the building. May immediately felt comfortable and seemed to relax completely. *"This reminds me of the South,"* she kept saying. One evening, she enjoyed the children's swings, humming all the while.

May was constantly busying herself. She wanted to do everything in the house where they were staying and give it a good cleaning. At the same time she was curious about everything there was to see. Obviously she was attached to the land. However, she often repeated, *"Young people don't want that kind of work any more. It's too hard. They laughed at us. They all want to work in offices."* During a walk in the state park, the group went to a farm restored for tourists. Young people in old-fashioned costumes explained how to use the equipment and showed the different kinds of farm work. May spoke to them very nicely, but she insisted that *"[It's] hard work. You were so tired on Friday that you could hardly move during the weekend."* She noted that maybe young whites wanted to do this work, but not young blacks.

The other family on the weekend vacation was Puerto-Rican. The two mothers, even if they could not talk to each other directly, discovered to their surprise that they knew the same situations in their lives, and they shared a concern for their families. This similarity united them at meetings for families at the Fourth World Movement house. *"You learn to know people of other races. We are all the same,"* said May.

"The last ones living there."

On the way home, Ronald, the youngest Jones boy who was then ten, said, *"I close my eyes; I don't want to see 4th Street. I hate 4th Street."*

They came back to a half-empty building. The electricity was off in the apartment because some young people had gone into the basement and connected the electricity to the meter to light the apartments where they were squatting. *"Young kids are stealing the plumbing and appliances. I'd be afraid to leave the girls alone in the apartment with no electricity. I want to get out of the building as soon as I can,"* said May. And yet William, helped by Annette, the youngest girl who was then twelve, continued to sweep the hallways in the building.

A month later, fire engulfed one of the hallways, and the light bulbs on the landing had been broken. *"All I want is to get out of the building,"* said William, adding that they only had three children with them at the moment, thus increasing their chances of acceptance in the project.

In December, May observed that there was no more heat or hot water and that the ceiling was beginning to come apart in places. *"I sent the older girls away."* May had cut out a newspaper ad for an apartment in Queens and was looking for someone to accompany her because she felt like a stranger in New York.

Only after Christmas did the family finally receive a notice that they could move to a complex in Astoria, a section of Queens. May recalled later, *"We were the last ones who were living there. To be somebody, you have to live like somebody, not like animals."*

Jenny Robinson

During her first six years in New York, Jenny successively occupied several old apartments near the streets where her mother, Carrie, and her brother William's family resided. At this time also she married and had her second daughter. Then she established her family in the Bronx where she stayed for four years. The oldest girl, Sue, said of that period, *"I liked it because my mother was working and we had friends."*

In June 1978, Ernie (May and William's oldest son) asked a Volunteer for a little help to *" . . .move some clothes for my aunt (Jenny)."* This was the first encounter the Volunteers had with Jenny, who lived alone with her daughters. They returned to a small, newly-built complex on the Lower East Side, moving in temporarily with Carrie Robinson, Jenny's mother. *"The rent [in the Bronx] was so high, I couldn't afford it,"* said Jenny. *"I had to give up my apartment to live with my mother. There were three rooms: a living room, one bedroom, a kitchen and bath . . . Then we had problems there."*

Carrie had just been offered an apartment in a complex that was highly valued by the neighborhood people because, having been constructed on the site of demolished apartment buildings, priority went to those former tenants, with a certain number reserved for senior citizens. So Carrie had the apartment for herself and her granddaughter Christine. At that time, regulations regarding limits on the number of occupants remained in effect. The presence of Jenny and her two girls in her mother's apartment violated the regulations. Jenny had to go.

> *I moved from there to live with the kids' godmother. We didn't get along, and then I had to come back to my mother's. But she had been transferred, and I had to take one room with two kids.*

"They really think you are nothing."

A few months after May and William Jones moved into the complex in Queens, Carrie found another place in the southern end of the Lower East Side. So Jenny stayed alone in the neighborhood where they used to live very close to each other, visiting each other very often. For three years Jenny endured uninhabitable living conditions. *"I've lived in bad apartments,"* reported Carrie, *"but never like my daughter's. I don't know how she can stay there."*

Jenny had become very active in the Fourth World Movement. With other adults in New York, she took part in preparations for an international meeting of Fourth World adults, "Full Rights for All." Jenny brought up her experience:

> *The buildings next door are abandoned! When they sealed them up, all the rats came over here. I'm allergic to cats. I need one because of the rats. The walls are wet. So I have clothes in boxes packed all over the place. The living conditions are very bad. We have to live, eat and sleep in the same room. So we all have to sleep in one room. When I have company . . . everybody has to sit on the beds. I get disgusted with the place. I'm not confident even when people come. I try to keep them away. It's like I'm hiding out. It's not right, living like this.*

As her mother often said, *"It's just not right that they have to live like animals."*

Then Jenny was chosen to become a delegate for the international meeting in Europe. Her trip to Europe gave her the opportunity to meet other people who have gone through hard times. She felt they were in much worse conditions, not being able to speak up in their country, not having their civil rights. She was determined not to give up for her own family but also to do what she could to help other families.

Jenny filled out housing applications, *". . . at least ten and I had four interviews."* She suffered from asthma and insomnia. From a clinic she finally obtained a certificate affirming that her relocation was urgent and that she required the use of an elevator.

During all these years, Jenny had a job. A mother caring for a family was helped by welfare when her pay was inadequate, but the additional income was sometimes ridiculous.

> *One time they sent me a check for two dollars! I was really embarrassed and I never went to cash it. Can you imagine standing in line with people in the bank to receive two dollars? They think you're nothing, to send you a $2.00 check when you have kids.*

Jenny said proudly that she had always worked except when she was pregnant and after an accident in 1980. She broke her ankle, resulting in serious complications.

> *I had to apply for full assistance. I have only one income coming in and that's through my welfare. I'm not really able to work. Before the end of the month, I have no food. What you get from welfare is not enough to last until the end of the month. This is why a lot of people steal today.*

Fortunately, Jenny could always count on her mother, who visited almost every day, to support her.

> *Some days my mother would bring food here. One of my girlfriends might get her stamps and loan me some. I'd pay her back when money came. Sometimes I have been at my lowest, and my mother came to the rescue. She always did. Because if it was not for her, I don't know what I would do sometimes. All kind of crazy things could be going through my mind. When she came over, right away it lifted a burden from me. "Go ahead, keep trying," she would tell me. "Pray," and I'm praying too.*

In May 1982, Jenny finally obtained housing on the Lower East Side. *"I feel like a million bucks,"* she said when she shared this good news. She moved with her daughters, Sue and Linda, then thirteen and ten years old, into one of the vast Lower East Side projects.

1980s: LIFE IN PUBLIC HOUSING

Jenny Robinson

"Children have the right to learn."

Jenny moved recently. Her previous apartment, located on the thirteenth floor in a large project, was fairly near the street on which she had lived. She returned often, keeping ties with one of her sisters, Kay, and her friend Mary Jo, both of whom were having a very hard time. Circulating an appeal in the neighborhood, Jenny observed, *"It is hard to involve people. They have their own problems."*

Jenny and a Puerto Rican woman from another neighborhood project helped the Fourth World Volunteers organize the neighborhood Street Library.[3] Jenny was already quite involved in the Street Library program. Worried about the growing number of homeless children, she explained, *"There are so many children who don't take advantage of school."* She came to read to the children whenever her health allowed it. However, her leg had always bothered her since an accident in 1980 and she had very low blood pressure.

The two mothers decided to look for a place where the Street Library would not be interrupted in bad weather. They prepared what they wanted to say to the community center's Project Manager so that he would let them use a room,

> *The Street Library is important. Reading gives them [children] a better future; it keeps them out of trouble, out of drugs. Books teach you how to live well. You have to choose good books. We want the children to learn. We would like to bring them together, because they have the right to learn!*

Jenny brought Mary Jo along, although her friend was in a bad mood. The woman resented the manager's lack of enthusiasm for their project. She ended up insulting him, and then she got angry, reproaching Jenny for being too polite: *"You are too nice with him; you have to talk nasty to these people."* Jenny made excuses for Mary Jo, although it was she who caused the failure of the project. She knew what Mary Jo was going through: *"She has too many problems, and now she has started to drink. She is in two rooms with five kids. She can't stay anymore. I try to help her."* For her part, Mary Jo couldn't control the anger and despair festering inside her because her first daughter had been placed in foster care: *"I didn't have anything and I had to give her away. I couldn't raise her. I couldn't take her back, because I still didn't have much."*

Having a better apartment did not enable Jenny to escape the destructive environment of the neighborhood where she had to raise her daughters and continued to raise the boys. Separated from the father of her oldest children, she was anxious to keep contact with him: *"It is important that both parents can be involved with their children even if they don't get along with each other."* She tried to explain the absence of men in a lot of the other families around her: *"It's hard for the man to take responsibility when he doesn't have a job and he doesn't feel like he can help."* She knew so many who had no skills that could lead them to a job that paid enough to support their family. Jenny's daughter Sue added, *"They have to prove that they are someone."*

However, Jenny said,

> *I had to raise my children alone; that's the hard part. People are more into drugs. It's a big problem. So many people that I knew have started robbing, stealing and even killing; that, and AIDS are the biggest problems.*

And Sue added, *"Half the guys I grew up with are dead or in prison."*

Jenny stated,

> *You can't let yourself be destroyed by what is happening to young people. You have to cope with it. You have kids. You tell them what's right and what's wrong. Then they grow up, and they have a life of their own. There is nothing more you can do about it . . .*

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[3] Street Library, see glossary.

> *I have struggled very hard for them to stay in school. I don't want my children to live like me. Now they need a good education, so they can get a good job. The more they learn, the better they will be. I want them to have a better future.*

And today one of them is back in school, hoping to enter college.

For years, the people in the old neighborhood survived amid the shells of half-destroyed buildings. Finally, these were razed one after another, and the land was stripped. Some of the people with rural backgrounds joined together to transform parcels of this land into gardens. They established an association to manage them. All the members had keys to the gate and their own plot to cultivate as they pleased. Jenny held membership in one of these gardens, which she cultivated with the help of her nephew, Ernie Jones.

In the summer of 1984, she suggested to the Volunteers to organize the Street Library in the garden once a week. It was a great success. The children were touched by the calm which this corner of nature offered in the broken-down neighborhood, and the members of the community garden association took part in the program.

But when Jenny's cabbages and cauliflowers were stolen, she was very hurt: *"I worked so hard! .If they had asked me I would have given them away; but not like that!"* The following year, she abandoned her plot, but she offered the suggestion that the children have one to cultivate during the Street Library.

Hospitality.

For five months, Jenny took in a couple and their five-year-old son whose apartment on 4th Street had been vacated for renovation. *"I took them in because I know what it's like not to have an apartment."* However, during this period, she had asthma attacks. Encouraged by Jenny's unconditional support, this mother redoubled her efforts to find a place: *"We even wrote to the President."* But the housing crisis was at its peak; regulations were even tighter, and it was practically impossible to find a place without going through a homeless shelter, which the young family was finally obliged to do.

"I wanted to work."

Because of her health, Jenny received a grant, but hated being dependent and empty-handed at the end of the month.

> *At Christmas, we wanted to buy a Christmas tree even if we didn't have anything to put on it. Like that we will feel the spirit of Christmas. I don't want my children to live like my grandparents, or my parents, or even me. I really would like to work like I used to do. I remember that my grandparents were working people. They hardly had anything. But when they didn't have a job, they didn't have any place to live either. I don't want that life here, and that's why I want to go back to work and earn my living.*

Jenny's health gave her no respite. In 1985, she had arthritis and a bad diabetes attack: *"I was afraid of becoming blind. The doctor told me it was sugar in the blood."* Finally, she recognized she would not realize her dream of working outside her home: *"I love kids. I might as well take care of kids."* Already, the oldest daughter of her niece Doreen came to stay with her when the girl ran away from a home. One of Doreen's last children was also placed with her by social services.

Then in December 1986, a television appeal caught her eye: *"A baby for Christmas."* She responded, and received an answer in January. When she received and filled out an application, one-year-old twin boys were placed with her.

Two years later, when Jenny had to be hospitalized for an operation, the twins were placed with another family. But Jenny was attached to them and wanted to adopt them. She fought to have them again, and in 1992 the children became legally hers.

May and William Jones

The Jones family, as many other families who had settled in the Lower East Side, were relocated to new neighborhoods. Often these new locations were very far from family and friends. This move made the Jones family lose touch with some of the friends they had made in their former neighborhood. But, the Volunteers found the Jones family in Astoria, Queens. As often as possible, the Volunteers tried to keep contact with the families they had met in 4th Street.

Astoria was known as a neighborhood of small, private houses for middle-class families. But between the boulevard and the river was a large complex of brick buildings, each six stories high, with little space between them, on land full of garbage but empty of trees or plants. It provided a startling contrast with the houses on the other side of the boulevard, of which she dreamed.

The entrance for the Jones family was located directly under the windows of their apartment in the block along the boulevard. During one of the first visits, a Volunteer remembered a group of noisy young people blocked the entry and two poor children were near the elevator on the Jones' floor. One of them was pushing an overflowing garbage can to the incinerator.

Job loss.

By moving here, the Jones family ventured into a completely new environment. But the center of their life gravitated around the old neighborhood. To travel back there, they had to take three different buses and pay for two tickets. The trip lasted more than an hour. On 4th Street, schools, hospitals, and stores were accessible without taking any transportation. Suddenly, money was necessary for four bus tickets for each member of the family, whatever the reason for the trip.

William Jones had reached the age of 46, and his health was declining because of the work demanded of him since childhood. Two months after the move, a youngster from the neighborhood confided to a Volunteer one day, *"Doreen's father is really sick. I told his son that he should take him to the hospital."*

After leaving 4th Street, William was free of the heavy janitorial work, but he continued to repair the heating system, which meant a daily commute. He gave it up after three months. *"He hurt his back carrying all those pipes,"* said May.

William's job loss completely changed the family life-style. Also, since May continued to suffer from her chronic asthma, they each had to apply for disability payments that required medical certification.

Only a heartbeat away from the hospital.
Since their arrival in New York, the Jones family had always gone to the same hospital. May was well known there, and she had spoken to the doctors and nurses about her participation in the Fourth World Movement. She even asked them for a contribution to the children's delegation during the International Year of the Child in 1979 since Ronald (May and William's youngest son) was a member. In moving from the neighborhood, May had not figured on changing hospitals, but she needed money for the bus fare to get there.

William, out of work and disabled, could not stop himself from drinking. *"When folks have too much trouble,"* said May, *"they start to drink and they don't stop."* May never opened up about the difficulties that this caused for the family. But occasionally, she phoned to cancel a visit or a meeting, commenting simply, *"I can't come today,"* or, *"It's better not to come today."* After a while, she did not dare leave William alone because he burned his hand once without realizing it, and almost set fire to the apartment another time.

At the end of two years, hospital stays for William increased markedly. He had a stroke and became too ill to stay home. Although their daughter Sandra managed to be home as often as possible, William was definitively placed in a nursing home. This was located in a neighborhood outside of New York, very far from the family's apartment. Once again, the trips were demanding in time and money. May went back and forth, bringing home piles of clothes to clean and taking back what he needed. These trips shaped May's life once the children were independent. She continued her daily phone contact with her mother-in-law, Carrie. Together, the two women visited William and even planned a time when they would share an apartment.

For the children.
"My mother and father stayed married all these years. They never neglected us. Everything they had, they shared with us." That's how their fifth daughter, Sandra, clearly identified what determined the choices that William and May made for their family. Both of them remained attached to Georgia, their birthplace, but they never regretted coming up to New York in spite of all the difficulties they confronted. *"I really love Georgia,"* said William.

> *I know my way around there. Everyone in Georgia knows me. If I had my choice, I would be there walking around those roads, those long roads. If I could get on as half as good as I'm doing here, I would be all right in Georgia. But there is more chance to make money here than there. You can get a little more help in New York than in Georgia.*

And May said,

> *I'd love it if I went back by myself. But it's terrible to raise children in the South. I'm here on account of the kids. They're doing better here. Little kids do get help here. In Georgia you don't get any kind of help.*

May persistently encouraged the children and the young people to keep up their studies: *"I ask the teacher to mark the homework so I can see if they have done it. You have to go see the teachers all the time."* She herself planned to go back to school, especially when she moved to Astoria, but it became impossible when William's health declined.

Not all the children got their high school diplomas but, through the Job Corps program, they were able to get a skill and get a job. The goal of this program was to offer training to young people from low-income areas by sending them outside their neighborhoods to broaden their horizons.

However, it was also very difficult for these teenagers to find their own way to make it in New York City. Sometimes parents wondered where would be the best place to raise their children so they could grow into happy adults. Life in the street of these tough neighborhoods did not help them. Today Sandra is thinking of getting out of New York City to raise her son. *"I don't want him to live as teenager in New York City."*

William and May did what they thought was best for the children. May tried to give them her faith in God: *"I was mostly raised up in the church. That's the way I try to teach my kids. They all go to the church where they were baptized. God never abandons you. Lord have Mercy."*

They were pleased when they saw their children remember what they had learned from Volunteers. They were proud of Sandra, who always had books at home to read to her young child. Seeing some of them get a job and become independent thrilled them.

And others' children.

In the Jones' current home, there are pictures everywhere: pictures of children, like their youngest son who went to Europe, along with other children, to attend an international conference. May felt very thankful to the Volunteers who chose Ronald to participate. And in her new environment she continued to pay attention to children, other people's children. When a Volunteer couple, after a fire in their 4th Street apartment, were also looking for housing, May recommended that they come to Astoria because, *". . .a lot of families here needs help."*

May knew what people thought about the neighborhood where she lived, and she was aware of the violence around her apartment building. A Lower East Side family wanted to transfer there after the murder of one of their children and asked her about vacancies in her complex. *"You wouldn't want to come here,"* May answered. *"It's awful what goes on."*

When the Fourth World Movement spread out to other neighborhoods through the families who had moved from 4th Street, several Street Libraries opened, organized with the help of these families. May wanted very much to help start one for the children in her neighborhood. She often observed that there was nothing for them, and she went so far as to try to find a place for one in her area.

May did not find a place to run the Street Library but still she was anxious to get involved in her neighborhood preparing the Fourth World Movement's festival "Human Rights for the Poorest" in 1983 in New York. She invited some children on her floor to her apartment so that the Volunteers could work with them on the preparations. She set up sewing material and was eager to serve refreshments to the children. She accompanied them to the festival. *"You did things for my children on 4th Street and now I have to do things for other children and help you,"* she said.

Since William was in the nursing home and her children were on their own, May spent more time helping the neighborhood Baptist Church which she attended. Her faith in God remained a permanent support in her life. At the same time she never lost contact with the Volunteers and always asked them to let her know about Fourth World Movement events, even if she couldn't come each time.

Carrie Robinson and Christine

Grandmother at home.
Paradoxically, it was in aging that Carrie Robinson could finally experience some relative security in life. Although she had worked all her life, she was not entitled to a pension because her employers never contributed for her. She felt this was a grave injustice: *"The people I worked for did not pay Social Security for me, and that's why I'm in the shape where I am in now. I don't have anything."* But because of her age, she could obtain a minimum pension, or SSI (Supplemental Security Income), paid to some disabled people who had no pension.

Further, senior citizens received priority status in public housing. Some of these projects were specifically for them and in others, housing was reserved for them. This was how Carrie secured housing from 1979 on in a Lower East Side complex with her granddaughter Christine, for whom she cared. Caring for her granddaughter involved contacts with welfare which bothered her a lot: *"They want to know if anybody is helping you paying the rent. If you say 'yes,' they take away everything. They don't give anything and they don't want to."*

There were many maintenance problems in this already old project. Carrie often spoke of lack of heat, of humidity, cockroaches, and the broken elevator. But the conditions were acceptable when compared with those she had known before, and she adapted to life in the projects.

Raising her granddaughter Christine was Carrie's major concern since coming to New York. Staying home, she also took care of Jenny's children when Jenny was working. For a while, social services had her care for foster children, a way of bringing in a little more money. Carrie was proud of having been able to play this role:

> *I kept a lot of children, all races: white, Spanish. I took care of all of them. I get along all right. Nobody bothers me, I don't bother them. I always try to treat people right. I don't care what color they are, white, black. I always honor them and treat them nicely. We all have red blood. God made us all and loves us all.*

While Carrie was able to take care of one of her granddaughters, she remained deeply hurt at not being able to prevent the others from being placed in foster care. She spoke about her daughter Kay, from whom three children had been taken, and of another granddaughter: *"I have had a granddaughter in a foster home for years, and I was not able to get her out, not yet."*

As the years passed, Carrie lost none of her energy to struggle for her family. She always managed to earn a little money on the side. She saved pennies, since "*. . .people don't even bother to pick them up,*" and also she collected and sold empty cans "*. . .until I have enough to buy socks or clothes.*" One winter, when the heating was not working, she went to a second-hand shop to find blankets. She saw a quilt, like the patchwork ones she had made as a child with her grandmother and the neighborhood women. That gave her the idea to take up making quilts again and to sell them.

Out from under.
So Carrie had what she needed as long as Christine was school age. But she wanted the child to become independent. *"I told her, 'You have to have something to do.' I saw papers about the Job Corps; I showed them to her; I bought her a ticket."* For two years, Christine was in the South for Job Corps training.

Christine returned home at the end of two years, but no job opened up. *"They were supposed to get her a job but they didn't get it,"* Carrie said, referring to the Job Corps. She was expressing her disappointment and her desire to see Christine secure for a better future. The young woman was taken in by Carrie, and she continued unsuccessfully in her job search. Two years later, she gave birth to a little boy. He added to the household and renewed Christine's determination to get out on her own.

As soon as she could, she registered again for training in a new government program.

> *I was getting welfare, and I was tired of it. I went to one of the WIN centers where they send you out for job placement. They asked me if I knew how to type. I said, "Just a little." They told me about a training program where I would be paid while building up my skills. They interviewed me, and that was it.*

The program aimed at freeing young mothers from the increasingly unpopular welfare system. Instead of receiving a welfare check, the mothers were paid during a training program and until they located employment. Theoretically, the program was open to everyone on welfare, but the target population consisted of the young women who dropped out of high school close to graduation time. Christine fitted this profile perfectly.

Christine worked but still did not succeed in finding her own apartment. She was now in a new income level with a higher salary than her grant had been, but with expenses she never had before, particularly medical expenses. Since she worked and lived with her grandmother, the rent went up, and Christine had to pay for her share as well as her son's. Still she could see a light at the end of the tunnel and spoke of wanting to go to college if she could put aside some money.

After Christine left the house every day, Carrie took care of the child, which seemed quite natural to her, *"I brought up my children and my grandchildren, and now I'm raising my great-grandson,"* she said. She shared his mother's ambition for him, taking him to pre-school. *"I'll try to keep him in school as much as possible. He needs an education. If you don't have an education, you can't get a job."* The child completed his pre-school program at the same time his mother received the diploma for her training, and Carrie said proudly, *"Now I got two graduated from school."*

Bringing others into the family.

As soon as she heard about the Fourth World Movement from her daughter-in-law May, Carrie joined as an active member. She kept up-to-date on everything, carefully reading her copy of the Fourth World newsletter and phoning May or Jenny immediately after she finished it to talk. She participated regularly in the meetings at the Fourth World house, always bringing her homemade cake. When asked why she came to the meetings, Carrie answered, *"I don't say a lot, but I like it a lot. I'm listening."* If there was a celebration, she came with a shopping cart filled with food she had prepared. *"In my house," she said, "there is always something to eat for the people who don't have anything. I know what it means to be hungry."*

In 1989, several members of the Fourth World Movement decided to participate in a March for the Homeless in Washington, DC. At 79, Carrie was first in the ranks in spite of the fatigue of the trip. She stayed near the banner that read, "700,000 children ask, 'Why can't my family have a house?'" She found it quite natural to stand beside others and to announce with them their refusal to accept families living in conditions that she had endured.

Carrie remained a faithful member of a church all her life. The denomination didn't seem to matter very much to her. She said that different churches she attended were *"all about the same."* The church is the place where she also can contribute to the well being of others. She insisted on taking the children she cared for. *"I just feel like if they go to church, they will be good and loving."*

The patchwork.

In 1992, Sonia, a young woman who had been a member of the Fourth World Movement, died of AIDS after having lived through terrible years of suffering as she persistently tried to build a family and protect her son. Her death was an awakening for the other families, many of whom knew victims of AIDS. Mothers were terrified on discovering that they had AIDS and unknowingly had given it to their children. Children were taken from them because the risk of infection was too great. The children with AIDS were adopted and completely deprived of the care and affection of their own family. There was a hospitalized prisoner no longer able to receive visits from his family; his wife said, *"We are in prison too because we can't see him any more."* There were the young people lingering in the streets and converted buildings in the perpetual search for little jobs and finally trapped in the drug cycle. Each one of them remained present to the group's memory.

Across the country, for several years in the closing decade of the century, families and friends of AIDS victims periodically displayed in front of the White House and other public places an immense patchwork quilt showing the names of AIDS victims. It represented an appeal to the government as well as the public to make a commitment to combat this scourge and to offer compassion to its victims.

The families who are part of the Fourth World network were anxious that Sonia's name be on the quilt. Carrie Robinson immediately volunteered to teach patchwork and to be part of the sewing group. May did not wait long to be part of the group. Because of Carrie's knowledge, transmitted by generations of poor people, women of different milieus, ages, and ethnic groups united in a project that allowed them to add names to the traveling national memorial that points to the dignity of every human person.

This monograph of the Jones-Robinson family is also a patchwork. It consists of the lives of individuals, families, and communities in various surroundings during successive decades. Through the colors of suffering and courage runs an unbroken thread of hope: a memorial to all those who devoted themselves to building the family for a better tomorrow.

THE SANTITUK FAMILY
THAILAND

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is in southeast Asia and lies between Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Malaysia. It is an agricultural country in a tropical climate with a year divided into summer season, wet season and cool season. The north is a series of mountain ranges, and the central plains are drained by several rivers. The northeast is a plateau region, while the south is on the gulf of Thailand. It is the only country in southeast Asia never to have been colonized. It produces abundant quantities of rice, silk, teak, sugarcane and seafood, exporting all of them. It has to import pharmaceutical products, energy and raw materials for industry.

The country is governed by a constitutional monarchy. The present king, Bhumidol Adulayade, is a descendant of the ancient royal family, the Chakri. The Thai people are calm, smiling and welcoming. The country now has a population of 55 million, twice as many as 30 years ago. Many Chinese have settled in Thailand over the past 300 years. They run most of the businesses. One should also mention the Indian influence, and the existence of tribes in many parts of the country. The official language is Thai, derived from Sanskrit. The country is predominantly Buddhist. The Muslims (4% of the population) live mainly in the south. Christians (mainly Chinese) are a tiny minority (less than 1% of the population).

The capital, Bangkok, is on the Chao Praya River; the four main rivers from the north are its tributaries. It is a city of contrasts, a mixture of past and present, capital city of a country which lays claim to belonging to the group of "newly industrialized countries," and has an annual economic growth rate of 10%. The city has experienced enormous development in recent years, even more than the rest of the country, particularly in terms of population: 20% of the inhabitants live in slums, which differ widely from each other and are located wherever people have a chance of finding work, often in the inner city.

It was at the request of several French families who had long experience of living in poverty themselves that full-time Volunteers[1] from the International Movement ATD Fourth World[2] went to Thailand. Those French families had been touched by several television reports of the exodus of Cambodians to the Thai border and were worried about what might become of the refugees. They approached Father Joseph Wresinski[3] on the matter and he asked them if they would agree to do without Volunteers who were then working with them. They agreed to allow two of the Volunteers to put themselves at the disposal of the Red Cross in the camps on behalf of all the families.

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[1] Full-time Volunteer, see International Movement in glossary.

[2] International Movement ATD Fourth World, see glossary.

[3] Father Joseph Wresinski, see glossary.

Thai friends in turn asked the Volunteers to join them alongside the poorest families in the slums of the capital. They suggested that they go and join the children wherever they happened to be in order to introduce them to reading and give them access to various means of expression. That "Art and Poetry"[4] project went on in the street for over ten years. It moved from slum to slum as more abandoned families gradually came to light. In those Street Library[5] days, the team of Volunteers discovered the children's thirst for learning and their passion for all the activities suggested to them: books, drawing, painting, games, crafts. Adults came along to see, get interested and join in. For the team running it, this project was a wonderful way to get to know the families in precarious circumstances by building a relationship of trust and keeping daily written records of what was happening to them, or in their neighborhood.

A Thai woman friend who had to go abroad asked the Fourth World Movement Volunteers to build on the friendly relationship she had built up with a group of young people and children living in the street, near the Sapanput Bridge. Through these young people they discovered that whole families lived in that area, families like Poeng's family and others who would be together again later on in the slum.

Early in 1968, the Fourth World Volunteers in Bangkok wrote:

> Near the Sapanput Bridge and the jetty for the ferry across the river, food and drink sellers had their stalls. The children all around were very young. Some begged from people waiting for the bus. As soon as we came along, the children came to us, about ten in all. We got out books and games. Some children remained there with their families. Adults also came to see us and asked us questions. One woman picked up the book about the story of Venerable Master Tao and told us it was a good book. Another person wanted to teach us Pali words, such as magic spells. There were people working nearby. They looked over and asked us what we were doing. Some brought us fruit and drinking water and asked us to come and play with their children, saying that what we were doing was a laudable act. . . .

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[4] Art and Poetry , see glossary.

[5] Street Library, see glossary.

The Chinese New Year.

The end of January 1988 marked the Chinese New Year, the year 2531 in the Buddhist calendar. The inhabitants of Bangkok caught the festive spirit. The Chinese in the city formed a prosperous community, living on trade, often over many generations. Most of their stalls and restaurants were grouped together in the same area which inevitably became known as Chinatown, and was the scene of many of the events described in this monograph.

The first day of the New Year feast was devoted to shopping. Chinatown was very lively. In the general effervescence there was work for everybody who wanted it, and those who usually went hungry had more to eat. This was a great day and a holiday for the poor of Bangkok. They were in a position to provide a lot of services, transport goods and work in the catering business.

On the second day animation was at its height. Everyone was awaiting the dragon dance. The dancers, often people from the slums or the streets, were camouflaged under the body and head of the beast. They performed various figures and pyramids.

In the heart of the area, a corpulent Thai woman with long hair, Poeng Santituk, made her way, jostled by the crowd, with her four children by her second husband. She held her ten-year-old son Pyra, and her four-year-old daughter Preo, by the hand; her eldest daughter Pympa, aged 13, carried the youngest Vimla, in her arms. Amid the music and the sound of firecrackers, they stopped to wait for the mythical animal and watch it pass. As it appeared, the children's eyes opened wide with admiration. Poeng, the mother, was dressed in the garb of the poor and her face bore the marks of a life of suffering. As she was alone with her children, people gave her gifts of money. This was a day of joy and feasting for the whole family.

The money they had collected throughout the day would enable Poeng to buy enough to eat from one of the many hawkers in the area. This was a feast day and everybody could eat to their heart's content. Poeng began to think about the dragon dance again. Maybe next year, her son Pyra could be one of the dancers . . .

“You can't live here.”

Poeng Santituk, sitting in the shade of the bridge by the big square, was topping and tailing chili peppers with her children. The work burnt their fingers but the merchants paid one baht a kilo, and so the family was able to earn 50 bahts by the end of the day, just enough to enable Poeng to pay for the day's food. For months she had been looking for somewhere to live with her children. She had moved from one precarious shelter to another, from Samut Prakan, in the suburbs of Bangkok, to this Sapanput area. In the course of her search, she had come across Kook, her eldest son, and her first husband Chali who also lived on the street. So they decided to share their wanderings for a while.

Kook's father was handicapped and could not get along alone in life. For years his son had been taking care of him, following him from street to street and at the same time maintaining a sporadic relationship with his mother. At this stage, his father was not in good health. He had a large gash on his head with several stitches in it and open wounds all over his body. His mind was far away, as if distracted. He talked to himself, gesticulating and moving to and fro for no apparent reason. As she went to meet him, not far from the Sapanput Bridge, Poeng remembered that she knew that area very well. It was there that she had sold fish in the wholesale market for a while with her second husband, some years before.

Chali, Kook, Poeng and the children lived by the canal for a while under an awning. But when the rainy season came, all their belongings were soaked. They then left their little canvas roof to take refuge in an alley in the shelter of the wall of a house, although the water still poured down from the roof. As soon as the rains ended, they went back to their awning. Later on they moved into the little park by the statue of Rama the First. That was a period of respite where they all had a chance to rest a little and Poeng shared her children's soup with Kook and his father.

Forever being moved on.

In March 1988 the police came to move along all those who were living under the bridge and by the statue of Rama the First. Perhaps this had something to do with tourism or the preparations for the celebration of the King's 60th birthday. In any event a notice appeared on the wall: "No dwelling and no refuse dumping." The few families living there had to disperse. Poeng and her family took to the road again. They spent a few days in the Chinatown market, then a period in Chinatown by a canal, then in Sapan Han, in a carport. Ten people lived together there for a while: Poeng's family, Kook and his father, and three young people who had broken with their families. Poeng's fate was to continue to be closely linked with all of those street dwellers.

Poeng did not want to stay there, nor did she wish to go back to any of her previous haunts. She feared the rainy season; it was too cold for the children when it rained. She sought a place where her family could at last stop walking and not be constantly turned out from one miserable location to another.

She also remembered the other child she had had by Chali: he was barely able to walk when he fell into the water and was drowned. That had happened not very far away, on the banks of the Chao Praya. Despite that painful memory, it was in that direction that she set off in May 1988, in the hope of finding in the shantytown a hut she could rent by the day to face the rainy season on the other side of the bridge she knew so well.

In the slum.

Poeng found what she was looking for and decided to rent a shack. Kook preferred to stay with his father in the carport. Neither of them wished to be a burden on Poeng, who already had enough responsibility with her four younger children. Poeng knew she would see them again from time to time. She took along the younger children who accompanied her, like planets around the sun, to a new location near the Watt Prayun Pagoda on the other side of the river. Vimla was lying on the barrow lined with rags sleeping peacefully.

In the slum, which then housed about a hundred families, Poeng rented a tiny shack, two meters by four, from the private owner. Her home had a door but no window. There was no water and no electricity. The houses were built directly on the ground without the usual piles. Housing like that, rented by the day, is not very common in Bangkok. A few years later, a person who worked alongside the families driven out from locations all over the city said he had never known places of that kind. Everywhere else, the slums had a modicum of internal organization and offered their inhabitants some housing security, sometimes by the week but more often by the month, if not longer. In general, the shantytowns were a step on the way for many families trying to move into the city. Despite major efforts, the city was unable to offer enough accommodation for all those arriving in it.

Poeng knew many of her neighbors. They had crossed her path at a time when she too was on the street. Like her, they came to rent or sub-rent a shack for a few nights, depending on how much money they had, just to get a rest before going back on the street again in many cases.

When she set up house with four of her children, Poeng had only very few belongings with her: a few bits of crockery, a few cooking utensils, and clothes piled up on a push cart. She quickly got used to life in the slum. She turned the space over which the roof projected into a kitchen. Just in front of her hut, her jar could be filled with water from a pipe, provided she paid its owner 7 bahts. That meant she had enough both for bathing her family and washing the dishes. A few paces away there was a latrine used by several families.

The shack had only one room built of old planks recovered from somewhere else. The roof was made of several different strips of galvanized iron, many of them with holes that let the water come pouring in. The Chinese woman who owned the place would come along every day to collect the rent of 15 bahts[6] and turn out anyone who could not pay. The accommodation was very cramped indeed for five people. Yet Poeng still managed to take in young people who she knew had broken with their families and therefore had neither board nor lodging, as was often the case for her eldest son.

None of the shacks in the slum on this squatters' site could be regarded as a legal domicile. This is perhaps the most telling evidence of the extent to which the poorest families are outside the social fabric. In Thailand neither object nor person is regarded as having legal existence without a legally registered link with the land.

The gap between the most dynamic and the poorest families in the slum (Poeng was one of the latter) was fairly marked. The most dynamic families had maintained business relations and friendly ties with their home villages or their families, which gave them the means to go into town, head held high, and run a little business of some sort or be taken on by the many firms looking for laborers. They were only temporarily in the slum. Unlike them, the poorest people there never seemed to have regular work nor any relations who could honor them or provide a way out of misery for them. It seemed they had no choice but to live where they did; it was either that or the street.

It was mainly with those families that Poeng had dealings and, like them, any ties beyond her immediate family were very tenuous. She did have her mother to stay with for a while, and she sent some of her children to one of her relatives in the country. Her family remained a point of reference for her and she knew that, as a last resort, she could always count on them. But she did so only as a last extremity: she even delayed the administrative procedures she would eventually have to go through with them in order to provide her children with the identity papers they needed not to be arrested for loitering.

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[6] 15 bahts at the time, now 18, was the equivalent of the cost of two meals in a street restaurant (about 20 bahts) or three cokes (18 bahts).

Under Thai law, anyone aged over 15 must carry an identity card to be shown at any time on pain of arrest. To obtain the identity card, two documents are required: a birth certificate and a housing certificate. If the person was not registered at birth, he/she may ask a person who was present at the birth to testify to parentage. The housing certificate is by far the most important document for the citizen. It is a kind of family record relating not to a person but to a recognized domicile. It lists all the individuals living under the same roof and all those who can cite that address as their home, provided the place is legally recognized. The country recently legalized school enrollment for children without this administrative document, which was previously deemed essential.

Poeng was, therefore, part of the community of survival and unspoken understanding, formed by the seven or eight families whose fate she had already shared in the streets of Bangkok. Almost all the families she knew had had one or more of its members imprisoned, mostly for begging or other offenses relating to alcohol or card games.

In the rainy season, from August to October, the slum was in a disgusting state of filth. Refuse lay rotting in the stagnant, foul-smelling water, covered with flies. The families then waded in the mud and muck. Mothers made the derisory remark that they were lucky that the rats and dogs had fled to more pleasant locations.

In quite a different context, Father Joseph Wresinski said about the families in Noisy-le-Grand France, in 1962: "Some thought these people were simply country people uprooted from their land. In reality, they are families uprooted from their country. They are not even part of their country anymore. They no longer have any connection to the world around them. It is true that they have self esteem problems and their suffering is both psychological and moral. It is for that reason that we love them and refuse to abandon them. But we will do them no good if we fail to understand the economic and social history which has led to their suffering."

In the slum and the surrounding area, the children were left with almost nowhere to play. At one of the entrances refuse dumped by the people in the area was occasionally collected by a city dump-truck. Oblivious of the rubbish, barefoot children played ball despite the risk of cutting themselves on bits of glass and metal. One lad, his feet black with filth, walked on a plastic bag which had melted in the heat and stuck to his naked foot: it was Pyra. A few weeks later, the space on which the children now played would be occupied by a mountainous pile of stones and rubble from the walls of a demolished temple. The children in the slum had no games or toys other than the things their parents managed to salvage from the garbage cans for them. One evening, a father brought back an enormous plastic duck, washed it carefully and gave it to one of his children.

A little before 8 a.m. the children from the slum went to the Watt Bank Say Kay Temple to attend school with the Buddhist monks (bonzes). That was practically the only place where the slum children could get regular schooling because anywhere else enrollment was subject to the old administrative requirements at that time.

The Buddhist monks seem to have remained in contact with families as outcast as Poeng's. They continue to provide the services for them that they have always provided for the poor, sharing the food that is donated to them, helping them to take care of themselves and give their children the opportunity to have an education when the public schools will not take them in. Not only that, but in March 1990 a Buddhist monk from the nearby temple (Watt Bang Say Kay) even opened a nursery school in the heart of the shantytown that Poeng and her family lived in. He took on aspiring primary teachers to run it.

Surviving as a family.

Amid other families in chronic poverty, Poeng was without a partner, alone with her four children. Nevertheless, she took care not to deprive them of the links they had retained with Vit, their own father, and her second husband. He lived not very far away, in Sapanput, with his new wife and baby. Over several months, the children went regularly to visit him, sometimes even every evening. They would go to beg for a coin or some food. But their father's situation was no more comfortable than their mother's. He ended up in prison on several occasions.

At times relations were strained. Yet the children were proud and happy when their father improvised an outing or a walk, or when he invited them to go and see the crocodiles. This was his opportunity to demonstrate the affection he had for his children. Moreover, Pyra and his older sister, Pympa, both expected that one day their parents would live together again despite their separation.

At one Street Library session, the children talked about what family life meant for them. Pympa wrote that she wanted the place where she was living now to become their house and she wanted her parents to come and live there together. Pyra wanted his parents to be rich and come back to live together and he also wanted to have things to entertain him.

When their father had to spend time in prison, twice in close succession, all the slum families felt personally concerned by his arrest and Poeng's family's misfortune. It was as if their one and only family had been affected, as if one of their own had been arrested.

Poeng had to do the best she could to live and provide a living for her family. She did so with obstinate courage but did not always succeed, and then her children had to find food for themselves.

Poeng carried within her the memory of her parents' life with its rhythms and requirements. She came from Maekhlong (Samut Songkram), a town 72 km (57 miles)—west of Bangkok, an hour's drive away. It is a coastal town in the heart of the Gulf of Thailand. She spent her whole childhood there. At the age of 20, she married Chali and set off for Samut Sakrorn, a town halfway from Bangkok. The family continued on toward the capital in search of somewhere to settle. It was at that point that they lived in the shantytown for a while and their second child drowned in the river.

Then Poeng met Vit, who was to be the father of her four youngest children. He too came from the fishing background in which Poeng had grown up. Most of the people in the coastal provinces made their living from fish: fishermen, fishmongers and workers in the fish-processing industry. Who was that man, so affectionate with his children, yet who sometimes took refuge in violent outbursts, drinking bouts and undesirable company? In any event, he could offer his wife no home other than his own parents' house. Poeng thus lived with her parents-in-law for several years and did not feel at home. Tension grew up between the two families.

As the mother of four children, treated as a stranger in the house and looked down on by her husband and his family, Poeng felt ashamed. When her husband left her to go and live with another woman in Bangkok, all she could do was to leave.

Poeng and her children.

The family's circumstances became more and more desperate and Poeng's children were growing up in a very peculiar universe which was increasingly unstructured. All they knew was the disheartening reality of the street, and the need to manage somehow. Some days, while Pympa looked after the two little ones, Preo and Vimla, Poeng and Pyra went off with a push cart to collect printers' paper in Chinatown. Paper was worth two bahts a kilo, and cardboard three bahts. But how many other people had got there before them to pick up paper and cardboard? On other days, when the merchants had delivered the spices to be headed and tailed, all the children gathered around their mother. Vimla lay across her lap, Preo was at her feet and Pyra and Pympa worked with her to finish the 50 kilo sack by the end of the day. Poeng's family clung to little jobs that could provide the wherewithal to survive, although discouragement continued to grow . . .

Poeng dreamed of a better life for her children. But what future could they have in that city which was developing at a furious rate, where traffic noise was incessant and whole areas were being razed to make space for enormous blocks? Life and the city were changing fast. Pyra often asked for a few bahts to spend on the proliferation of electronic games nearby. And then there was violence, often the result of the traps set by alcohol and drugs used as an escape by many who wanted to forget their misery and shame for a while.

At forty-two, Poeng had an imposing frame. She looked like a rock. Her features were heavy and deeply chiseled by life. She often seemed impassive, as if nothing could reach her. It was not a good idea to interrupt her, for instance, when she was reading one of those comic strips at four bahts a piece, that sang of love and happiness. She genuinely believed them and needed to tell herself so over and over again. All by herself, she offered a surprisingly strong resistance to misery. And yet, on occasion, her face relaxed and grew animated, as, for instance, when she was able to fry some fresh fish in front of her shack and serve it up with a bit of vegetable and a typical sauce. The traditional dish she prepared smelled good and was well presented. Her children crowded round in delight: *"It's nice when Mom does the cooking,"* they said.

From this time on, her most reliable allies were her children who shared with her the chores necessary for the family's survival. When Pympa's mother became discouraged, dirty clothes and dishes piled up in the shack. Then Pympa was the one who went to the river as did other girls of the same age.

At the end of 1989 Pympa made a stencil at the Street Library. She cut out a drawing and used it to print. She showed great patience and interest. But when she was asked to write something, a line or two to explain her drawing, she closed up completely. That happened to her often, as it did to her brother, Pyra. It was as if a wall had slid into place, as if nothing could reach her and no dialogue was possible on any subject.

A few weeks later, early in 1990 a Volunteer wrote:

> Pympa is concentrating, she is patient and interested. She would have gone on painting after 6:30 if I had not had to leave. The result was astonishing. She was basing her work on a Gauguin painting. Her drawing was clean and fairly precise. Until then, she had often been content with small things,

> working at the level of the least gifted children, scribbling and making a mess.

As she grew up, Pympa began to distance herself somewhat from her mother. Adolescence and an encounter with a girlfriend meant that she was less and less ready to look after her sisters and so she caused her mother additional headaches. She worked for a while in a restaurant to bring in some money. But she could not stand the ten-hour working day and in addition she had serious allergy problems affecting her hands. Yet she did try to help her mother. She went to her grandmother's home for a while to learn to work in a fishmonger's, but she did not stay very long. Then she tried working in a factory, but with no great success. She came back to her mother in the slum, then went off with her pal to Chiang Mai, a city in the North, and spent three months there.

Now that Pympa was less and less often at home, it was Preo who looked after Vimla. Vimla had the independent temperament of a wild cat. Ever since she was very small, she devoured any food there was and when there was none, she cried out for it. She wanted to make herself understood. She was a child who knew how to defend herself; she looked after herself and had a lot of cunning.

Preo remained calm and attentive to all members of the family. When she did something, she wanted to do it properly. And when her mother came back to the house ready to collapse with exhaustion, Preo was the one who looked after her, sometimes helping her to have a shower and comb her hair. Preo might be slow in her work but she was patient. She never left her mother at this time, even if she was sometimes the victim of her nerves and her anger.

Sometimes her behavior worried the Volunteer in charge of the Street Library who wrote:

> As sometimes happens, Preo was completely apathetic. She had to have everything said to her repeated again and again. She remained motionless with her mouth open. She needed to be motivated to do anything, even to pick up her pencil. Then she would remain motionless with the pencil in the air. When asked why she was not drawing, she replied that she did not know how to draw people. Yet she had already drawn so many earlier, all by herself. She had to be told how to make a little man and have the steps dictated to her: "Begin with a circle for the head, then two little circles for the eyes, and the nose and the mouth, and the ears and the hair." If I forgot to mention any feature or presented them in the wrong order, she would correct me! Sometimes, once she had done the head, she would carry on alone and arrive at a very structured well-designed result. She would achieve the same standard as the older children, aged 8 to 10, although she was only 6. But sometimes, I had to go on listing the features because she would take no initiative and do nothing but object: "I don't know how, I can't do it" or "I'm lazy, I can't be bothered."

Pyra was ten when he arrived in the slum with his mother. He had learned to read and write. He liked school but stayed away more and more often to help his mother make some money by collecting goods for recycling all over Bangkok. He had a limp from being knocked down by a car and not having his injuries properly treated. He could often be found at the jetty, jumping into the river, swimming with the street urchins who were his playmates.

Hope that must be strengthened daily.

Sitting in a corner of her shack, Poeng had an air of being sunken into herself. Suddenly, she saw her mother, Muon, comes in. What a joy to see her again! Muon looked pensive. She and her husband had been separated for four years. She no longer had a home but was living with a friend and working as a cleaning lady. She was always active and, when she had spare time, she read the paper. She decided to open a restaurant in the slum, just in front of Poeng's place. During the day she cooked meals which she sold in the evening. She was particularly good at preparing one of the popular seafood dishes. The success of the restaurant certainly contributed to the recognition of the family. Poeng took note of the happiness which Muon evoked in the very poor people around her. Everything seemed so natural and simple for her.

But Muon did not stay. She went away after a few short weeks. When the neighbors heard she had gone, they suggested that Poeng carry on with the restaurant. Poeng started dreaming of all she and Pympa could do when her daughter returned. Yet her anxiety grew as that return came closer. As soon as she saw her daughter all her plans went up in smoke. Pympa had changed. She dressed well and wore make-up and she was not ready to look after her sisters anymore. She sniffed thinner.[7] Poeng no longer had the energy to carry out the plan she had dreamed of.

In the early 1960's Father Joseph Wresinski tried to help the young people who came to work with him understand the cycle of hope and discouragement that was the hallmark of destitute families in France. He pointed out: "That family constantly makes a new start. They used to live in a tent, then they lived in various igloos (the nickname for the temporary shelters in the shantytown). Each time they put their lives together all over again: the husband went to look for furniture in the Emmaus [an organization like the Salvation Army] reserve, the mother found bed linen. Yet every time, one fine day it all came to an end and they broke everything up. On Sunday, the husband smashed the table and a day later the glass panes. Then a period of passivity, indolence and lack of commitment would set in. The parents ended up saying: 'Oh well, so what! I had a job, now I'm not working any more, too bad. The children have gone, so what!' They had each suffered so much that they could only go on living by becoming impervious to people and things. The very poor are not mentally ill. Misery obliges them to adapt to the unbearable in order to survive."

Then, more and more often, as soon as night fell, Poeng went off to seek brief solace in the oblivion induced by drink. She tried her luck at illegal money games. Her hopes took on the bitter taste of a more and more inaccessible dream. When she got home in the early hours of the morning she could not avoid making noise. Then Preo would get up in silence to help her with affectionate gestures to get to bed. She would even go out to get some water from the jar to wash her mother. Then she would go back to bed next to Vimla who watched her in the dark. At the age of eight, Preo took care of her mother with great delicacy. Why was there no one but her children to take care of her? Preo never complained about it. Would not every child on earth do what she was doing?

Pyra always got up at dawn. It was his responsibility to go and work for the whole family. He went off alone to find paper and cardboard, as his mother had taught him to do. The children knew that when their mother was too tired or downcast and was attempting to flee from her misery and her offspring, there would be nothing to eat in the house. They knew that they would have to get up and pick up some fruit or a bit of rice in the nearby market, and get some cooked food from the Buddhist monks.

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[7] A solvent.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Thus Pyra went on, picking up waste paper alone, but the results were sparse. If he lived by himself, he would manage on what he found, but with a whole family to support it was becoming difficult. So, since his mother still did not seem able to summon up her strength again, he would set off resolutely with a red box in his hand to beg in the tourist areas. He still remembered his mother's distress one day in March 1990, a few months earlier, when Tao, a woman from the slum, was arrested with her baby by police for begging in the street. His mother had then gone into action with a few neighbors. The baby was what motivated them to get the woman out of prison as quickly as possible. Pyra really did hope to earn more than he did from gathering waste paper. He made his way through the red-light districts at the risk of arrest. He knew that the law forbade begging, but he would take his chances in order to collect a few bahts which he would proudly bring back to his mother to restore her energy.

The inevitable happened and Pyra was arrested by the police for begging in Patpong. He was taken to a detention center for children. There he would get the food he needed and also some medical care. But for Poeng this was a disaster.

Poeng went to the house of spirits in the slum. As always, there was water there, earth and flowers and some statues. The house of spirits symbolizes human beings' respect for nature, and for the earth where they are only in transit. When a person has self-respect, he can respect others and be respected by them. Poeng changed the water and made an offering of a garland she had made herself. That gave her the courage to shake off her torpor and the strength to go and see her son.

Poeng went to the home to visit her son. They both cried at length. Pyra told her he cried every day and dreamt of her and his sisters and wanted to go home. One night he had even dreamed that he was going home and found her drunk because she needed him so much. Child that he still was, he promised that he would never beg again. Poeng encouraged him and told him he would never have to beg again, that she would help him to sell flowers or do some other job.

A fortnight later Pyra left the home, thanks to the solidarity of the slum families who helped Poeng to gather enough waste paper to have him freed. She had had to register herself and Pyra on her mother's housing certificate. But her mother had no certificate anymore since her separation from her husband and the sale of the family home. Muon, Poeng's mother, had nevertheless managed to have her name added to the residence certificate of a friend with whom she was now living and for whom she worked. She managed to add Poeng and Pyra as well.

In an exchange of correspondence between children from several countries, a year earlier, Pyra had written this short message to introduce himself:

> *My mother has been feeding us since we were babies. My mother is the best person in the world, she's affectionate, she brought me up ever since I was very small. Then she sent me to school to study in primary 1, 2 and 3 and then I left school.*

Once at a Street Library session, Pyra had burst into tears one day as he read the story of a street urchin all by himself. He said: *"That story is not a bit like mine because I have a mother who looks after me."*

Loy Kratong.
There were times when society seemed to be more fraternal and more friendly to the very poor, particularly on feast days. Then life became possible again for them. Loy Kratong was approaching. It would be possible to find work again. The families got organized and helped each other. Even if the feast lasted only one day, the majority of Thais took part and the poor could find work making garlands and other things.

Loy Kratong would take place along the river by which many poor people lived and where they often came together to do the washing and where the children played. Loy Kratong is the feast of forgiveness for all bad actions done in the previous year. It takes place when the moon is full and the tide high, about mid-November. On the eve of the feast several people, adults and children, got together in the slum in front of Poeng's home to make kratongs, which are little boats in the form of lotus flowers.

On the evening of Loy Kratong they went as a family to lay these vessels on the water. Then they sold garlands and kratongs. Pyra was one of the children putting themselves at the disposal of people who wanted to put their kratongs in the water, light a candle or a stick of incense. They sold matches and lighters. Others swam a little further on to pick up the money left by the faithful as an offering inside the kratongs that carried their vows and wishes.

That misery may be at an end.
Preo and Vimla sometimes went to the nursery school built by a Buddhist monk in the heart of the slum. There the children learned rhymes to remember the letters of the Thai alphabet. From her house, Poeng could hear them singing in the school.

One evening the two little girls got home from school and threw themselves into their mother's arms. Then they caught sight of a man they had never seen before. *"That's Uncle Tô,"* Poeng told them, *"he's going to stay with us from now on."* Poeng looked at him with great tenderness. He was covered with large tattoos and his hair was curly. He was not a man from her region, like Chali and Vit. He had never known the fishing community. But suffering and misery were things he did know. A long time ago he had killed a man and had spent all of his youth in prison, up to the age of forty-five. He came from the old capital, Ayutthaya. Poeng said later on, *"I don't love him but I felt sorry for him."* How many women living close to Poeng have said the same thing about their partners?

Tô smiled at the children. He was sorry he had not gone to school at their age. Yet he had had more chance to learn than they did. Knowing he could not turn the clock back, he said: *"Life is beautiful when you're young. You must go to school to learn a trade!"* He would have liked to be able to help them, but he was destitute. How can you help others when you cannot help yourself? Pympa and Pyra were embarrassed by his presence, but the two little girls liked him. Tô sometimes helped them get ready for school. He was also at home in the evening. He and Poeng took good care of the children, praising their good work.

A Volunteer involved in the Street Library wrote,

> Preo's third drawing was very beautiful. I urged her to color it correctly, changing the colors often for the various parts of the drawing. She complained a bit, saying, *"It's difficult. I don't feel like it. I'm tired."* But once she had finished the drawing she was happy and proud. She wanted to go and

> show it to her mother. She came along with me when I was leaving and I stopped at her house. Poeng was there with her partner. I showed them Preo's drawing. Preo had run on ahead of me and was sitting waiting next to her mother's friend with a big smile. *"I did it,"* she said.

But these moments of peace do not last long in the midst of poverty. Worn down by deprivation, Poeng and Tô drank a lot more than usual one evening. Tô flew into a violent rage and picked up an ax with which he struck Poeng. After a few seconds of stupefaction, the neighbors intervened. Tô disappeared. Poeng was taken to the hospital, accompanied by Pympa and a neighbor. A woman passer-by handed them the money to have Poeng treated. She had a broken nose and a gash on her arm. Yet she refused to file a complaint. She knew the risk she was taking when she invited Tô to join her family. She also guessed how much he had already endured in prison. Moreover, she was well aware that she too was capable of the worst, given that miserable poverty forces people to do the opposite of what they would like to do. *"Living in these conditions so close to each other wears your nerves down in the end,"* said one of her neighbors one day.

Several days passed. Poeng was sitting in front of her shack. Beside her, her companion was helping her to prepare a meal. They were chatting. Preo was sitting between them. Vimla was on Tô's lap and bursting with pride to be there. A Volunteer wrote:

> That day I learnt a real lesson. I asked myself how you could forgive someone like that? Is it because they are familiar with the deepest chasms of misery, and know from their own experience that human beings are capable of the worst, that they also become capable of the very best in the twinkle of an eye, capable of getting back together and forgiving each other? That day, those very poor people taught me what real forgiveness meant and how it could generate peace.

And tomorrow?

One morning in November 1990 Poeng found that a red number had been painted on her cabin and all the others along the edge of the slum. The houses were to be cleared to make space for a new road. Threats became more specific over a period of weeks and months. She was panic-stricken. Was she to be once again a vagabond with her children in the streets of Bangkok? Then in a brief moment of despair, she thought about separating from her children. She came to see a Volunteer in May 1991:

> *If we're evicted, and I find myself on the street with my children, it would be better for the three little ones, Pyra, Preo and Vimla, to have a roof over their heads and a chance to learn. I could go and see them on the weekend. They'd learn. They'd have food on the table every day. Pyra could go to the Buddhist monks. He's a boy and he could work with them in the temple. He'd certainly learn a lot there! And maybe he might even get a scholarship to continue his studies and have a trade. For Pyra it's not yet too late. Pympa and Pyra are intelligent. Pympa went to school up to PO5 [fifth year of primary school] and Pyra to PO3 [third year of primary school].*

Then she turned to tiny little Vimla and said, *"You too must learn to read and write as soon as possible."*

On the way back from an outing with the children, Tô said:

> *Why do you Farang [foreigners] like people like us when even the Thais don't like us and are not interested in us? Our children have to be educated, we need people to help us educate them because our children are not undisciplined or ignorant. If they are not educated, they'll stay as they are.*

Just as chronic poverty is universal, the ways to overcome it are too. A little while later, the Buddhist monk who had opened the nursery school came to visit the family. He talked about a new pilot project for five little girls of Preo's age. He had rented a house where a few children could stay together from Monday to Friday in order to learn better. It was a little boarding school run by an elderly woman. Every morning the children would go to the temple school at Watt Bang Say Kay. Then they would come back to their parents on the weekend. *"Vimla can come with Preo,"* he added at the end of his visit. Maybe that was the answer to their parents' concern about their future.

On October 17,[8] 1991, what was later to become World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty, people gathered in the heart of the slum right in front of the little school. For weeks the children had been preparing posters at their workshop sessions and thinking about the topic of peace. The mother of one of the children was the first to speak. She was trembling with fear, her face expressionless. Then when she heard the applause, she relaxed and began to smile. Then a woman read the translation of a message from Guatemala telling of a four-year-old girl who had gone to pick up some food and been run over by a truck on a garbage dump.

Then the children each read their messages about peace. They were proud. They each had a sheet of paper with their message written out in very large letters. Even those who had not written anything wanted a sheet of paper to read now. Pyra created a sensation by reading his sister Vimla's text, written on a poster made by Preo: *"Peace means having no war in the house."* When the adults heard that message, they all laughed and clapped. Some slapped Poeng and Tô on the shoulder. Some said: *"Yes, yes, that's it!"* Pyra was embarrassed and told those around him: *"It wasn't me who wrote that, it was my sister."*

The King's birthday.

When the cool season came, Poeng and her children went to the Indian quarter not far from the market to fetch blankets provided by the Indian merchants, as was the tradition every year. Throughout December pictures of King Rama IX and the Thai flag were hung in front of every house. The slum was no exception. All over town there was a forest of lights. December 5, was the King's birthday. Poeng, like all Thais, cleaned the house so that the whole country would be clean. She bought flowers and displayed them in front of her house. There was no meat in the market. On that day, the Thais vowed not to kill any animals, not to steal, not to lie, not to take alcohol or drugs and to not covet other men's wives.

Every year on the King's birthday, the people rediscovered their unity and their dignity. All of Poeng's family went with joyful hearts to watch the fireworks. Tens of thousands of people headed for the same place both for fun and in the hope of seeing the King.

On public television, the people heard the King's wishes and saw what action he had taken to safeguard the environment, to support poor peasants and to deal with the flight from the land which brought poor families to swell the slums of Bangkok. They trusted the King because he was the center of harmony, the man who handed out justice to all the people.

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[8] October 17, see glossary.

The crowd spent the whole night around the cinemas, theaters, concerts and open-air entertainment, all of which were free for the occasion. Poeng and her family and all the families from her slum and others were able to take part in the birthday celebrations just like every Thai.

The slum would need magic lanterns to project to all the images of the very poor's deep misery and a shadow theater performance of the hopes that slumber in the heart of every human being.

CHILDREN
FROM BURKINA FASO

INTRODUCTION

The first Fourth World Volunteers[1] arrived in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in December 1980. They had come to Ouagadougou to work in a shelter for old men and women. Gradually, during the first three years, the team[2] came to meet children and young people who lived on the street. In 1984, with the support of their friends from Burkina, and in response to the young people's expectations, the Volunteers started a place known as "Courtyard of a Hundred Trades."[3] There, local craftsmen come to teach the children and the young people various skills which in turn allow them to rebuild self-respect, dignity and hope for the future.

There the Volunteers met children and young people who had lost contact with their families and with the adult world. It took several years for the children and the Volunteers to get to know and trust one another, and for the young people to understand that the friends and Volunteers of the International Movement ATD Fourth World[4] were on their side, that they would respect their privacy, their families and their culture, and that they were working toward a common future.

Therefore, we were not yet able to involve them directly in the writing of their monograph, as Volunteers have done in other countries. The following text is inspired by the transcript of a meeting in which Jean Yanogo participated. Jean Yanogo, from Burkina Faso, was the first African Volunteer. He met the Fourth World Movement in 1982, helped the Volunteers start the Courtyard, and joined the team as a full-time Volunteer in 1985. He, better than anyone, could speak of what the family means in his country, particularly for the children who have been pushed away from their own families because of their poverty to seek out a better chance in the big city.

He had been a friend of the children on the street before he met the Fourth World Movement and he knew how important the family remained for the children. In the following excerpt, he writes about an experience which was particularly significant for him. He accompanied three of the young people to their families in the Ivory Coast; the three young men were very deprived and at risk of becoming delinquents. For many months the team had had hopes of reuniting them with their parents. And yet their return home was not an easy endeavor. After years of separation, both parents and children had given up all hope of seeing one another again, and the children had endured much hardship. This situation was common to many of the children who came to the Courtyard.

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[1] Fourth World Volunteers, see International Movement in glossary.

[2] Team, see International Movement in glossary.

[3] Courtyard of a Hundred Trades, see glossary.

[4] International Movement ATD Fourth World, see glossary.

There was no occasion to edit this text with him, as he passed away on the 12th of January 1993 in Ougadougou.

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Our action is based on respect for the families.
As Volunteers, we always try to understand what each child really wants deep down. The children and young people were constantly telling us about their families, even if they had left them five or ten years earlier, and even if it was very difficult for them. Since then, some of them are reunited with their families. Some would speak freely about it, others would not say anything. We kept trying to help them talk whenever possible. We always encouraged them to visit their families, to go back to their villages.

We knew that they were suffering from being separated from their families. They would often tell us,

> *Listen Jean, Pascal or Magdeleine,*[5] *listen to me! I am upset! When it rains, we gather together outside a shop and we talk; we talk about serious things. Often we come to talk about the family. Others can say, "I can go back to my family whenever I want; my family is there; my mother is there; my brothers and sisters are there!" I just walk away because I don't know where my family lives. I don't know!*

Often a child would tell us proudly, *"Next week, you won't see me anymore: I'm going back to my family, to my village!"* In fact he would hide away in some other neighborhood, and stay there for a while; he'd be careful that nobody saw him. Then he would come back and proudly tell everybody, *"Here I am, I'm back! I've seen my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters: they're all very well and the harvest was very good this year."* All this to gain more respect from the others.

Our family gives us life. That is why we do not let children talk badly of their families to attract our attention or pity, because we know it's not true. No father, no mother on earth can forget about their child. Even when the child is dead, they still think of him or her, they keep on sacrificing themselves for the child's sake. Until the parents themselves are dead the child will never be forgotten. And when people claim that these children do not want to hear about their real parents, it is nonsense.

In Burkina Faso, we think that the greatest lesson of Father Joseph Wresinski[6] is that we have to learn from poor families. Indeed it is through them that we have re-discovered how much family bonds matter in Africa. The family is very important. Nothing can be more important; it is the basis of society. In Africa people say, *"All mistakes can be forgiven."* But one has to know what door opens the way to forgiveness. Our team in Burkina Faso is convinced of this, and it is what keeps us going in our projects with the children.

The project was possible because, since the beginning, in all we undertook, we have shown how important the families are to us. Many people would ask us,

> *Why do you care so much about the families? Will the money spent to send the children to the Ivory Coast open doors for their future? If you had given that money directly to each child, wouldn't they have started something themselves to build their future?*

We believe that having a family comes first, before vocational training or setting up a business. Once, a child wrote in an album,

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[5] Fourth World Volunteers in Burkina Faso.

[6] Father Joseph Wresinski, see glossary.

> *In general, if young people get up and look for a job, they'll find one. But if we are alone, without our family, we can't find any. Some of us have been here looking for work for a long time, sometimes ten years, so in the end, our parents have forgotten about us. You don't understand anything anymore, like the meaning of life. Even if we have money, we don't see what worth it has. It's for my parents that I was looking for money. But now I don't find any worth in it.*

I do not mean that our first objective is to have all the children go back to their families. But, for me, it is very important for the children's future to restore the bond between them and their families.

In Burkina Faso it is very difficult to touch on these questions concerning the family. You need to find the right time. The Fourth World Movement offers ways of doing it, especially through the activities we organize. We know that a two or three month workshop program is not enough to provide a child or a young person with a job. But through the activities, the children can feel pride and gain self-confidence. It enables us to get to know the children better, to listen to them, to discuss seriously with them, to confront them. And this can lead to their family.

We tell the children and the young people who participate in the workshops,

> *You see, if you light a lamp and then cover it with a bucket, it doesn't make sense. We think that the first people concerned by your training here are your parents. So it is very important that you invite them to come and visit you in the Courtyard. In your villages, in your neighborhoods, people consider you as petty thieves. But now you are trying hard to learn a trade. Ask your parents to come and see what you are doing, and to speak with you and us.*

We also tell them,

> *We will never replace your parents. Therefore it's important that your relatives, your uncles who live nearby, know what you are doing, that they give their permission.*

Afterwards, we saw some of them dare to go and talk to their uncles or aunts, and they have kept in touch with them since. To the young people who train in mechanics and who will have to set up their own workshops, we say,

> *Nowadays, if you want customers to come to you, you need the support of your relatives. When people need some work to be done, they first ask themselves: "Is there a carpenter or a mechanic in the family?" We won't look for customers for you; so it's time you got your relatives interested.*

When we provide the young people with equipment for their shop, we invite the parents and give it to them for the young people.

Our plan to restore the families ties of children separated from their families grew and developed within this atmosphere and frame of mind. Meeting them at an early age help to build trust. Later they were more confident to speak about their own families and they asked us to help them to find their family members.

The "return home" project.
This project was born during a special camp we organized last year. It is during such moments spent together that the children experience some peace. The children and young people understood what it meant to be living together for a week, without fights or insults. It helped them to think about their lives. For us, it was a perfect time to get to know them better. They told us how much they wanted us to help them find their parents.

Who are these young people? We met them when they were seven, eight years old, and now they are eighteen, twenty years old. These children were re-joining their families in the Ivory Coast because their parents, like many people from Burkina Faso, had gone there to work. It was the first time we had been outside of Burkina Faso with the young people.

We took their request very seriously; we started preparing with them and also involved other people. We knew that their families included other people beside their fathers and mothers; all of them had relatives, either in this village or perhaps an uncle or a sister in the city. The young people helped us find those relatives because they trusted us. The project partly relied on these relatives, either in Ouagadougou or in the villages. They too were concerned about the children, and wanted them to go back to their families. They did not know how to accomplish this on their own, but they helped us prepare the journey.

It was not at all easy. To travel, you need a birth certificate. When your parents are not there to have it done, it is very difficult to obtain one. Fortunately, the Ministry for Social Services became committed to the project and helped us get special passes for the young people.

It might all seem fairly simple, but it was not the case. Nobody knew where the children lived in town, and they were confronted daily with many difficulties. Once we had chosen the three children, we started to go through the necessary steps with each of them. But one day, one of them was arrested and a month later, another one. When these two came out at last, we learned that the third one had been arrested. He was transferred to prison and when someone is transferred, that can mean for months. In fact, up to two weeks before our departure, it kept being very hard. We held on because we believed so much in the project.

We had to explain to the people who were supporting us that these three young people were actually among the most deprived. But how can you really understand a child who never spends a whole month out of jail and with whom, when you happen to meet him, it is almost impossible to have a proper conversation because he has taken drugs or has been hurt? Despite all this, the team kept to the project. The last week we kept a close watch on the three, to make sure that they would not take drugs or would not be arrested during the night.

We also had to resist the influence of others in the neighborhood, both children and adults, who knew that we were planning something with these young people. They would tell us,

> *It's not worth it. You think these children have a family? They don't! Why are you going to waste your money, to go to all sorts of trouble for these good-for-nothings who have no family and who take advantage of you? You are risking your life by traveling with them. They will run away, they will escape. If they want to go to Abidjan, they will manage to get there, even if they have no money! They know how to get there, and you are going to spend outrageous sums of money to take them there! I know for sure that this child is lying to you; he tells you his family is in the Ivory Coast, but it's not true. His family lives in X.*

During the journey to the Ivory Coast, I met some community workers and asked them to help us find the children's villages. Even those who thought that the project was realistic did not believe it would work. I also met with a priest to gain more information about the villages. The children were not sure about the names of the places, and some words sound different in the Moré language. The priest told us that he had seen some families who absolutely refused to see a family member after he was released from jail. He mentioned having himself accompanied young people or children, and having the family repudiate them.

But all these stories were like water off a duck's back to us; they did not bother us. We listened to what people told us, but we continued with the children. I kept telling the children, *"Let's keep trying."* But the children were worried, one of them would ask me,

> *What do you think of what people are telling you? I don't know about the other two, but for me, that's no problem, you can trust me. I want to find my family.*

And the other two would say the same thing. Not being at peace with their families was a source of anguish for all three.

Finding the right entry door.

The return to their family could not be achieved without the participation of their community. For each new situation, we try to see if there is any link with the child in the neighborhood or village. Up to now, we have always found someone. I remember the story of this very small child, he must have been seven or eight, who was eager to go back to his parents. The parents were separated and the child had never tried to conceal the situation. I realized I had friends in this neighborhood, so we tried to get in touch with them. In our country, when something like this happens, if you go and see someone and that person can't help you, they won't tell you, *"There is nothing I can do for you."* They will give you some other lead: *"You should go and see such person."* I explained the situation to my friend. He knew the child's family, and he told me,

> *We live just twenty meters apart. There is only one lot between our two houses. But even though I was born here, I never shook hands with the old man. He is so mean, he chased away all his children.*

But my friend was moved by what I had to say. He had not even thought that the child might be still alive. He talked to one of his relative, who said he would meet the old man's friend. But first he went to see the Imam of the neighborhood who told him,

> *You are doing the right thing, but let us think of who could talk to him. I can't do it myself, because he would tell me that I am intruding on his private life.*

However, the Imam himself went to see the old man's closest friend who said,

> *I know him very well, he is my closest friend. But I can tell you not to start with the father. You should first go and see the mother.*

The Imam questioned his own wife who told him she did not even know that the child was no longer at home. Since the divorce, each time she met the mother at the market place, the mother would give her some news of the child. Thus, little by little, through different people whom the child himself did not know, we managed to reach the mother. The father's friend committed himself. He said, *"Once the child is back in the mother's family, I can follow up."* This is the way the child was reunited with his family.

In such situations, you have to try to really understand. We should avoid doing an analysis right away. We need to ask people for advice. I never do anything without much reflection beforehand; and I always consider what's behind me before taking a step forward. When I was preparing the trip to the Ivory Coast, I was trying to make the children's worries and wishes my own. I always need time to take some distance, to think a situation over. You can never build such a project in one or two weeks. It always takes time. Making the concerns of others the foundation of your project, that's what makes the difference.

They had all experienced the suffering of not feeling at peace inside one's own family.

We were finally able to leave by late December. We did not know where the villages were. One of the young people was able to find his way around and remembered the name of the town, because he had left it only seven years earlier. The other two had left thirteen and fifteen years earlier. But we managed to get over all the difficulties with the help of the Fourth World Movement team in the Ivory Coast.

Truly, the families of the three children were happy to see them again, even if they had almost forgotten their features. One of the families thought that the child had been dead for years. They did not speak of him any longer. Someone went to tell the mother who was busy picking coffee beans. The younger brother said, *"Mother, hurry home, your son you used to tell us about has come back!"* The mother collapsed, overwhelmed by the news; she could not rise up to her feet again. She said,

> *When you have wept and celebrated the funeral, when you have offered the bread as a sacrifice in the name of your child who was dead . . . and then here he is!*

When we told her, *"This is Issaka,"* she would not believe it. She remembered that when he was four, just a year before he left, he had cut his knee with a knife, and that he had a large scar. She wanted to see the scar to make sure the boy was her son. But he was grown-up and he wore long pants. He had been injured before starting on the trip and had a stiff leg. She managed to make him show his wound but it was to see if he had a scar on his knee. And when she saw it, you should have heard her cry out! Then the father explained, *"We wrote. We wanted to make him come back here to the Ivory Coast, but we just could not go through all this."*

When people saw the pictures, they believed we had succeeded.

When I came back to Ouagadougou, since I could not stay longer in the Ivory Coast, I told the team, "I saw with my own eyes how the children's parents live. For instance, one of the children had left home seven or eight years before. At the time his father had a job and a good salary and the family lived in a good house. But when we arrived, we were taken to a poor neighborhood where the family had lived for some time. From there, some young people led us to an even less comfortable house in a slum; the streets were full of mud. His dad arrived carrying his bicycle over his shoulder. The child was sad. This same child had been so happy when the first boy had found his family. Then he had told him,

> *Your father works on a plantation and he sleeps in a shack. But my family lives in Abidjan in a house and there is electricity. You'll see, Mr. Jean, when we get there!*

He looked dejected, there was not even a place to sit down. I managed to keep the other children busy, so that they would not pay attention to it.

Back in Burkina Faso, the families who had prepared with us would not have believed that the children were actually home if it were not for the photos I had where they could recognize the father or the mother. They had told us that we were wasting our time and money. Even after seeing the photos, they said, *"We can't believe it! Just wait! In one or two weeks they'll be back here!"* So far, we have received a letter from one of the children, and one from one of the parents. But none of them came back.

We went to show the pictures to people who had helped us at the Ministry, because they too were doubtful about the project. We described the journey to the other young people at the Courtyard, and we showed them the pictures. There is no doubt that this project has raised hopes in these children, who often experience fear and shame. This hope is an encouragement for other children.

I spoke of the journey at a celebration we held near the grave of a child where people gather on the 17th of each month.[7] The children said,

> *If only we could, we would tell all the children and all the young people in the Courtyard to think of their families and to return home.*

But do their families know where these children are? Do they think they are dead?

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[7] October 17, see glossary.

PART TWO

ANALYSIS

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

> *When family life looses a sense of unity and togetherness, it is alarming for everyone concerned. When this happens to the very poor it means that they are losing their last protection against the destruction of human dignity.*
>
> *Father Joseph Wresinski*

POVERTY DESTROYS THE FAMILY

While short-term poverty sometimes reinforces support networks, extreme and persistent poverty tends to isolate human beings from their fellow citizens. As Father Joseph Wresinski observed:

> At the very bottom of the social scale, families have been reduced to such a degree of under-development that their fellow citizens can no longer recognize their common kinship to them. In these circumstances, they find it hard to consider themselves as responsible for the situation of these families.

However, the fear of identifying oneself with the person who has been the most damaged by life can also exist within the poor community itself and inside the family. Sometimes merely to survive, it becomes necessary to break the bonds of mutual assistance and to part company with loved ones, as these four monographs show.

1. Extreme poverty tends to tear families apart.

Chronic poverty has always been one of the reasons families split up. Among the families in these monographs, only the German family was able to experience life as a couple over a long period of time. But what a price it had to pay! When the Hirts got married, Mrs. Hirt's children were put in foster care because her husband was considered "disabled." As for the others, either the couple never formed because of a lack of housing and employment, or the men were imprisoned, killed or forced to leave by the daily humiliation of not being able to provide for their families' needs.

Sometimes the children leave the family to test their luck in the anonymity of city life. These children do not all come from poor communities but their isolation and lack of means can lead them into dangerous situations which seem to have no solution. Reports describe how in some countries children or parents are abused by organizations, some of which make a business out of them e.g., child prostitution, the sales of human organs or illegal adoptions. For families living in extreme poverty, these practices are a great danger. In industrialized countries, we know that some families live in constant fear that their children will be put in foster care. Too often, as in the Hirt family, children are permanently separated from their parents because of poverty.

When families manage to stay together it is at a cost of great hardship and self denial rarely revealed to others. They still have to face, daily, a life of deprivation, violence and humiliation which undermines the relationship between the parents, parents and children, and with their community.

2. Homelessness, insecurity, life without a "homeland."

Very poor families are often on the move, immigrating to the city from the provinces, escaping eviction or their neighborhood's destruction, fleeing from starvation or unemployment. These families are only welcome in a shantytown, a welfare hotel room, a hovel overrun by rats, an army barrack transformed into a shelter.

In Thailand, Poeng, who came from a small fishing village, emigrated to the city. She spent years in Bangkok trying to find a shelter where she would be safe from the rain and from police interventions. And even when she found a home, her tenancy was precarious, as she paid her rent on a daily or monthly basis. Doña Matilda suffered a similar fate in Guatemala.

The Jones-Robinson family in the U.S. experienced migration over three generations. Initially, their life appeared to be quite secure on a farm, but the family was totally dependent on the "bossman" who provided board and lodging, paid them (very little), employed their children, etc. A confrontation with him led to a total collapse of the foundation which provided for all their basic needs. When the family migrated, they looked for a familiar face or at the very least a familiar accent: *"They're from Georgia."* In New York, they also took years to find a habitable place to stay which was not a room in a hostel or a rat infested slum. Amidst all these difficulties it seems that blood ties were pivotal to the regrouping of the family, including children placed in foster care.

The Hirt family in Germany almost always stayed in the same region. They moved from one farm to another, then to more precarious lodgings such as barracks or an old farm turned into a homeless shelter. Until his death, Mr. Hirt never knew a place he could call home, and even in the early 90's his wife is being threatened with eviction. They struggled all their lives to find a home, working relentlessly, but never found one.

And what about the children who live in the streets of Burkina Faso? Their families have emigrated to a neighboring country in search of work, and they themselves never know where they will be spending the next night.

Millions of families are condemned to homelessness, to being perpetually in transit, to belonging to nowhere. They are chased away not only in times of war, but also every time a town is rebuilt or expanded. Families experience eviction from housing; destruction of slums without provision of alternative accommodation; the offer of temporary shelter where family unity is not always respected; so-called "provisional" refugee camps that last longer than a generation. Today there are 18 million people who are recognized as refugees. However the number of very poor people approaches the one billion mark. All these families are seen as "undesirable," sometimes not even appearing on the state registers, maps or censuses. The places where they try to put down their roots are regularly destroyed and taken over by others, leaving no trace of their history. When one belongs to nowhere and when one does not figure in any statistics, one has almost no rights and no access to the solidarity that comes from being part of a community.

And this is true for every country. The anguish of being homeless or threatened with eviction is the same everywhere, and becomes all the more serious where children are involved. The material suffering is obvious. There is no hope of improvement when one has no roof over one's head, when one's private life is exposed to the gaze of others, when one is constantly being pursued and forced to keep moving.

3. Effects on health.

Another effect of extreme poverty on individuals and on the family is the damage to their overall health. Poor physical health undermines one's strength and the ability to hold one's own in active life. The teams that edited the monographs were very discrete on this subject, perhaps because a poor physical condition often leads to rejection and exclusion. Obesity, severe underweight, lack of personal hygiene and disabilities caused by poor living and working conditions repel others. And yet good health is essential, particularly for those who have only their own strength to rely on. We can imagine the state of the young people in Burkina Faso when a mother tries to recognize her son by an old scar which is concealed by a quantity of more recent ones. After age 50, both the Hirts were almost unable to work. Mrs. Hirt is in a wheelchair.

There is also the question of infant mortality. This is particularly high amongst the extremely poor and leads to great suffering, and a feeling of failure and guilt on the part of the parents who did not know how to prevent it. Life expectancy is much lower than in the other less threatened social groups. This means that the chances of having grandparents to rely on for support are greatly reduced. In certain countries, especially where there are no social services available, it is the family that has to take care of its disabled, ill or prematurely aged. Sometimes, however, the family is so overburdened by these responsibilities (especially with the spread of AIDS) that it is forced to abandon its weakest members, leaving them to survive by begging.

4. The very poor family, often excluded from the sight, the conscience and the rights of their fellow citizens.

While most cultures and religions consider it a moral obligation to help those in need, it is another thing entirely to consider the very poor as our equals. One readily thinks that the very poor do not contribute to the advancement of society, but are a burden. It is difficult to recognize their attempts to live as families and easy to doubt their capacity to love "truly" and to raise their children. Pressures are brought to bear in all countries to limit the birth-rate of the poor or to substitute other adults for the parents in the raising of their children. Of course, very poor parents would like—as any parents—to be free to make up their own minds about child-bearing. Children are the greatest source of their courage and honor: in them they find the strength to resist poverty, to hope. But children are also their greatest vulnerability since society often intervenes in the welfare of the children, humiliates the parents and takes away their responsibility. We should certainly put an end to the conditions some children are forced to live in, but we should do it by providing the parents with the means of raising them, not by turning the pain of chronic poverty into the shame of foster care.

A feeling of worthlessness emerges not only from an environment which is hostile, contemptuous and afraid, but also from the community in which the family lives. It is when neighbors and relatives refuse to identify themselves with them, as in the case of Doña Matilda and Poeng, that the family finds itself totally excluded.

The German family, while living in the barracks, was excluded not only by the town but also by the other families housed there. The family itself did not identify with the inhabitants of the barracks. The shame and the lack of esteem common to all these families are not enough to create a social identity. However, when the Hirts meet other families who also suffer from social exclusion, within a movement that highlights their common dignity, they find strength in being able to identify with them and advocate for them.

Of course the poorest are not always condemned by those close to them. For example, in the case of the Thai family, when Pyra or Poeng's partner are arrested, the neighbors rally around to protect the family. But solidarity amongst the most deprived is very difficult to maintain within a section of the population so exposed to the public eye. In order to gain some esteem and to have access to help, very poor families often need to separate themselves from anyone who has already been stigmatized by poverty, even to the point of lying in order to conceal any connections that everyday life may have forged.

Sometimes this break-up of solidarity within a community can lead to that community's disintegration, with families finding themselves in enforced isolation without any basic security. The loss of solidarity within the community leads to a marginalization in terms of respect, accommodation and any possibility of social advance.

5. Partial responses to poverty tend to demean and humiliate the poorest families.

Generally speaking, measures taken to alleviate poverty often cause family break up. They are fragmented by category of problem or take a case by case approach, rather than having a comprehensive vision of the person, the family, the population affected by poverty and the society that gives rise to it.

a) Assistance, a precarious response.
The Jones-Robinson family is a striking example of the consequences of a fragmented social response: some social service programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, only served single women with children. In order for a woman to be eligible, a man she was involved with had to become "invisible." The extent of this can be seen in the monographs. Only women took part in the interviews and there are men involved in their lives whose names we do not even know. Since the beginning of time, and probably in all countries, it has always been accepted that widows and orphans should get help. The poorest also have this way of seeing things imprinted on their collective memory and they act according to pre-established patterns. In times of great hardship many men and young boys disappear or keep out of sight of social services (especially in Europe and in the U.S.) or even of neighbors so as not to endanger their family's benefits.

Most of those labeled as poor, such as the homeless (usually considered to be single people), young delinquents, street children, single mothers, etc. . . . are usually people who have lost not only their work or their homes but also their families.

We need to talk about the chronic marginalization from active participation in society, particularly of the young who, like the young Jones-Robinson or the young Hirts, are tossed about from one training course to another without ever acquiring any real qualifications, without ever hearing that their country needs them, without ever being asked for their opinion about their own future.

Father Joseph Wresinski talked about the loss of a legacy that the exclusion of the poorest constitutes for our society, denouncing in 1977:

> The human and spiritual waste resulting from a society that so lightly deprives itself of the experience of those who live in poverty. . . Who can know better than those who have lived through it what oppresses and destroys human beings? If only we listened to the most deprived families, they could reveal to us what it is within our society that crushes and violates people. They could serve as guarantors that any change, any progress, any new political direction would benefit all members of society.

b) Taking the place of parents.
Assistance tends to destroy the family and its dynamics by protecting the individual rather than the group. Assistance often intervenes in its private affairs, taking the place of the parents (as in the case of the Hirts and the Jones-Robinson) instead of joining forces with them and supporting them in their aspirations for their children's future. It is not that society does not have the same ambitions for these families' children as they do, but it shows no confidence in the parents' ability to achieve these ambitions. When children are removed into care as the Hirts' and Doreen's children were, it takes years for the distraught parents to build up their confidence and be able to talk about it: silence is sometimes the only sign of respect that remains in the face of such suffering.

Sometimes, the reasons for placing children in foster care are arbitrary. Karin Hirt's children were taken into care when she married for a second time and had the misfortune to ask for help. The social workers did not tell her that her children were at risk. They told her: "If you hadn't married that man, we wouldn't have taken them away." They did not reproach him for any abuse, but only for having a bad reputation. How could he have convinced everyone of his dignity or his rights in the face of such arguments? And above all, how can families form a true partnership with the services that are available to them when they see themselves being judged in this way, condemned before they have committed the slightest offense?

Removing the children for adoption is another way of taking the place of parents. Sometimes this is achieved through persuasion and sometimes without the knowledge of the parents, using illegal methods. The problem is that the very poor have very limited resources for their defense, not only because they have little access to the judicial system, but also because there is an almost tacit agreement (on the part of society's representatives in the courts) that even though the means are reprehensible, the children will be better off elsewhere than with their families. Such improper practice obviously accentuates the mistrust of very poor families towards any public or private intervention on their behalf. Parents teach their children to be suspicious of those whose job is to help them. Doña Matilda takes her son out of school where he might have had a chance to learn something. Those who intervene are reinforced in their conviction that those parents are harmful to their children and have no desire to find a way out of their situation; and the misunderstanding is further aggravated.

c) Inappropriate requirements.

Social exclusion is also created by requirements that the poorest members of society cannot, or believe they cannot, meet. Thus in Central America, Doña Matilda can no longer send her children to the nursery when the standards of hygiene become more strict and when the children are required to have ID and medical cards.

There are many such examples both in urban and in rural communities. An African nurse talks about the most deprived children who do not come for treatment or for preventative care because their mothers are worried that someone will notice they are suffering from malnutrition. In other places, studies show that increasing requirements of NGOs that are financing a range of programs had, over a period of three years, created splits within communities. Families who did not conform to the health norms imposed by the NGOs found themselves barred from certain services (e.g., pharmacy, literacy classes, etc.).[1] The village community found itself cornered: in order to survive against an advancing desert, it needed the support of these financiers and could not allow itself the luxury of opposing their demands. This example shows how communities which for centuries put up a united front against often very serious adversities now find themselves destabilized and endangered by the very organizations that want to help them.

Social workers do not always understand what important gestures mean for the family. Mrs. Hirt made it her badge of honor to see that her daughter was always clean and beautiful. The fact that her daughter wears a beautiful white dress, even though she lives on a farm, is criticized without the question ever being asked: Why this pretty dress when one is living in a place where it is so easy to get dirty? What does the family mean by this gesture?

THE STRENGTHS OF THE FAMILY

1. The family: source of human beings' true nature.

The family is the first and often the only place where one exists in the eyes of other people. It is an absolutely necessary and often unique place to learn about love and social life.

Doña Matilda had no family since childhood. The household which she shared with Don Esteban was her first family and when he was in prison she kept in touch with him against all odds in hopes of keeping the family together.

The price for living as a family is sometimes high. Poeng agreed to take back her companion even though he treated her so violently, in order to live as a couple once more. This kind of forgiveness, renewed daily, can be seen in very poor families from every continent, perhaps because without it the family could not continue to exist. How many women come back to the man who abused them or go to see him in prison? They say, "*He is the father of my children.*" What they mean is more far-reaching than that: they rightly know that behind the image of violence and resignation hides an individual who wanted to be tender, faithful or courageous. It is poverty which prevents him from showing himself as such. They also want to find ways to forgive a social environment which has so much trouble understanding them. "*It is not the fault of the rich, they don't have time to see us,*" said a little girl one day.

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[1] International Movement ATD Fourth World, Le savoir partagé: alphabetiser en Europe et en Afrique à partir des plus pauvres, (Sharing knowledge: literacy Classes in Europe and Africa from the Experiences of the Poorest Members of the Community). UNESCO, Paris 1994.

When Doreen leaves Carlos, also in prison, she maintains contact with him, especially after the birth of her child. In this seventeen-year-old couple we can see very clearly all the obstacles severe poverty puts in the way of family formation from the very beginning: lack of housing, education and work, and their makeshift ways of surviving which step outside the law. And yet even after Doreen and Carlos separate, they call each other "husband" and "wife," and are recognized as such by their young peers.

Families who live in extreme poverty are far removed from the concepts which distinguish one type of family from another:

> If the very poor fight for the family, it is not to defend a certain idea of the family, a moral or ethical code imposed from outside; it is to defend their own family, their actual, present family. And their family is far from being a strictly biological one, still less one sanctioned by law or custom. It is the family which they have created themselves, to the best of their ability, in the depths of their poverty and exclusion, a family whose natural bonds have been torn apart by the conditions of poverty. . . The family of the very poor is often a family whose children bear the names of several parents, a family which takes in people whose relationship is only that of extreme poverty or shared shame. If the very poor fight for the family, it is because they have agreed to be united in friendship with other people; because they have themselves chosen this union.[2]

For the Jones-Robinson, it is this wider set of relationships, the whole group of people closely connected with them—parents, grand parents, aunts, cousins, former husband or wife, etc.—which takes the place of a family, and as such demands the respect due to one. In other cases, it will be the village community or even the shantytown which works together to provide protection, identity, reputation, solidarity and the common culture which prevent social isolation.

The determination of these families to set up and maintain a home or, like the young Burkinabe, return to their family reminds us that the family is the source of human beings' true nature, of their identity, their responsibilities, and their participation in the evolving history of mankind.

2. The family: last line of resistance to extreme poverty.

The family is often the last line of defense against the dehumanization engendered by an everyday life of destitution. To bring up children and build a home in such conditions is to expose oneself willingly to every hazard, every unforeseen circumstance: it is to increase one's vulnerability. And yet, from within this fragility, the fathers and mothers are able to find the strength to fight for their children time and time again, to give them a roof, a home, a sense of worth, and a future in place of the street with all its danger. If Poeng did not have this identity as a mother, it is hard to see what would keep her from slipping into despair and self-neglect. But the way society considers these families in chronic poverty can easily eclipse their underlying desire to be human; people are reduced to problems to be resolved one by one, or to categories such as "teenage parent," "drug addicts". . . .

Couples which form under such conditions are often seen as a "union of two misfortunes." And it is true: Doña Matilda explained that she was attached to Esteban because he, like her, had an unhappy childhood. She knows what it means to be deprived of a family in infancy.

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[2] Modave, Andre. Volunteer. March 1993.

"It's very hard to have no mother to rely on," she says. When she and Esteban set up house together, both of them declare that it is the first time that they have had a home. They have both endured so much hardship that they know how essential it is, both for themselves and for their children, to live together.

The institutional response to poverty some countries have rarely takes account of families' needs. The Jones-Robinson demonstrate this when they have no choice but to live in welfare hotels or in a slum where each family has only one room, where they are afraid because of the constant invasions of privacy. It is a measure of their courage and endurance that they accept intolerable conditions in order to remain together, like the Hirts in their barracks, and like the thousands of families in industrialized countries who still hide in tents, caves or trucks, out of sight and out of reach of any potential assistance to avoid the possibility of their children being taken from them.

Without any doubt, Father Joseph Wresinski was among those who brought the importance of family to the very poor most forcefully to the attention of his contemporaries.

> When everything is lacking, people's only refuge is their family; only there is there still someone to welcome them, only there are they still someone.

He was untiring in revealing the everyday ways in which this determination to live as a family manifests itself, and this became for him the foundation on which the struggle against extreme poverty would rest.

The document "Reaching the Poorest"[3] puts this strength of resistance to poverty represented by the family among the principal characteristics of the very poor.

> The families find means to withstand the indignity of their situation, often from day to day. Both children and adults think of a thousand ways of earning a little money, of salvaging something that they can use for clothing or shelter. Those who have reserves of energy and health take on tasks and working conditions which would be impossible for less well-endowed workers. People who interact closely with them also see unsuspected efforts to maintain family unity, to live with their neighbors and give mutual help, despite the disputes and violence engendered by the depths of poverty.

3. The family as foundation of social identity.

For the very poor, the family is the first and often the only place where each member has an existence in the eyes of others, whoever one may be, whatever one may have done. This is vitally important: human beings are familial as well as social beings.

Social identity, for every human being, rests on membership in several different categories: family, profession, residential area, nationality. . . The very poor usually have no trade which gives them any standing, only a host of odds jobs which allow them to survive. Certainly these jobs set them apart from state aid or the need to beg, and confer on them an identity as workers of which they are proud, as we saw with the Hirts. But these casual jobs do not carry any wider recognition and open no doors to the future. The very poor are often ashamed of where they live. Their exercise of citizenship is hampered from the start by the fact that it is impossible for them to participate in their environment, and also by the constant uprooting which makes strangers of them wherever they go.

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[3] International Movement ATD Fourth World, "Reaching the Poorest," UNICEF NGO Committee, 1990.

To belong to a family whose defining feature is its poverty does not give one social respectability. What is it like for these families who at each birth are reproached as if for an act of ignorance? What is it like for these young people stigmatized by one or two generations of feeling worthless? Under these conditions, can they be proud of their parents, of their name? One's address is even a source of shame, when one has one. And what should we make of the millions of families condemned to homelessness, to constant moves, and to rootlessness?

At least family can offer its members a semblance of mutual recognition: *"I am his father, I am his mother, he respects me."* As for their environment, it is in the name of the children that a family claims the right to be integrated into the community and participate in it. Doña Matilda says, *"Everything I do is for my children."* So even if the very poor think that other people do not consider them valuable enough to take interest in them, they can still appeal to a sense of brotherhood in the name of the family. In addition, when faced with great events such as birth, love, suffering or death, people find that they are all equal.

Legitimacy, although less widespread than in other social environments, counts for a great deal: even if it is not always a guarantee of stability.

Family history is another determinant of social identity, and it is not sufficiently recognized how indispensable it is to all human beings. For example, in France there is an organization of people who were separated from their parents in infancy and grew up in foster care: one of their strongest demands, supported by 75% of them, is to have access to their family origins. Very poor families have often remained silent about their own history, consisting as it does of so much suffering and humiliation. *"I don't want my children to know what we lived through: it's too hard."* If the memory of one's experiences is constantly destroyed or denied, there can be neither transmission of values nor anchorage in a social change.

Yet, when this history becomes a source of self worth by establishing links with parents or with a recognized group, it is clear that families are enthusiastic to research their history and tell others about it. This was the experience of all the teams who edited the monographs which gave the families an opportunity to establish links with people in the Fourth World Movement recognized for their courage and endurance. As Father Joseph Wresinski said,

> To live is to be recognized; it is to be respected, honored. The poor know well that the day a person gives up the idea of being recognized and respected, the day this person first holds out his hand without becoming indignant or rebelling, even if only inwardly, in silence, this person and his family no longer exist, either for themselves or for others.

4. Children as a rallying point for social advancement.

For very poor people, to be a family is to stick it out and go on together. Family essentially exists because there are children to love, raise and protect, and finally *"someone who loves me."* Parents who are going through very hard times hope that the future will be better for their children, and also for themselves. The birth of their children clearly represents the possibility of breaking with fatality, of being included in the prospect of a future.

Often marriage or living together comes about after the birth of a child. It seems that loving each other was not enough to justify that the parents dare building a family even if they are extremely poor. Throughout the four monographs is found this strength, which is doubtless common to the poor of every age: that children create the family and give it its reason for fighting.

For Doña Matilda as for Poeng, it is clear that everything that they endure—the search for housing, money, work, food, even for a partner—is done for their children. Also, Doña Matilda and Poeng maintain relations whenever possible with the respective fathers.

Children's capacity to energize the family is particularly noticeable with very young children, who are thus most vulnerable but have not yet met with any adversity: they can inspire the solicitude and tenderness not only of their parents but also of older brothers and sisters and neighbors.

For the sake of the children's well-being and future the parents turn to their immediate social environment, whatever humiliations they may have suffered in the past: the clinic, the school, the Buddhist monk for Poeng, the team of Volunteers. The parents' ambition is for their children to learn, so that they never have to experience the poverty which they themselves knew.

Yet the poor are continually compelled to act counter to their aspirations. Doña Matilda determined to enroll her children in school so that they increase their knowledge. She herself had to wait until she was thirteen before she was able to study and give her spirit the freedom to develop, as she says. But the school was not aware of the conditions under which some of its pupils live and Clara Luz was often accused of being a beggar or a down-and-out. Moreover Doña Matilda needed her daughter to help in the house; so, when she saw how the girl was suffering at school, she stopped sending her, right in the middle of the academic year. Thus it is often mistrust and misunderstanding which keep poor families shut inside a separate world.

Children are a source of dynamism, pushing the family into the open to face changes in society, whatever the risks. In the U.S. monograph, they themselves take initiatives affecting their family or their community: Jenny, for example, who takes her mother to New York, or Doreen, who at thirteen years old finds a solution for the young Puerto Rican mother out on the street with her four children. The African children, even if they do not have much faith at first in the possibility of returning to their families, risk a lot in order to do so.

Because of the children, the family is the place where hope for the future is still alive. Very poor adults are prematurely exhausted by life and, at an age when others are beginning a professional career, their only ambition is often to find a place where they can become stable, escaping the condemnation of others, with enough resources for their survival. But for the children they say again and again, *"For them it's going to be different. They mustn't experience the same things we did."* Mrs. Hirt's experience is something like this: she worked all her life and ended up with no security, but she tells her son the importance of a recognized job.

5. The transmission of culture and values.

The family is the place where a common memory is created and passed on. It is the place where our basic understanding of human beings and eventually God is shaped. It is the place where an awareness of, and even a sense of pride at, taking part in the culture and spirituality of our social milieu, are developed. It is where one learns self-denial so that others can survive or grow; mutual help, not only inside the family but also with others, which is so necessary for survival; courage and endurance; the strength to be found in hope;

forgiveness and indulgence. A very poor family protects the most fragile: the handicapped child, but also the littlest one, not yet marked by failure, carrying within him all the hopes for himself and for the family. These are values which all the families in the monographs pass on to their children through their actions even more than their words.

Looking at what poor parents pass on to their children, are they so different from parents of other backgrounds? Mrs. Hirt makes it a point of honor that her son should have a job which gives him social status. When other poor parents are asked about the most important things to pass on to their children, they say dignity, *"keeping one's head high,"* and justice, a justice which demands that every human being, whatever his or her faults or failings, should have the right to food, shelter, love and equality in the eyes of other people.

These values are often lived out in shadows and in secrecy because they can harm the very people trying to live by them. For example, if a family takes in another family, someone will come and say: "You are oblivious, you can't even take care of yourselves!" And they threaten the family with eviction. Often it is our own distrust and interference which oblige poor families to teach their children the opposite of what they would want, even at the risk of breeding poverty from one generation to another.

In order to freely express all these values, the family needs certain material conditions and above all, social recognition in its neighborhood. It needs people to recognize the family with its aspirations and to accept taking risks with it.

Poor as they are, all the families embody a spirituality which is expressed particularly in their desire to be recognized in their humanity, in their capacity for hope, and in the fact that they link their destiny with other people, sometimes at the cost of sacrifices and enormous risks. For those who are believers, prayer is often a help in bearing hardships, as with Poeng and Doña Matilda, the one Buddhist, the other Christian. As soon as she knew her way around her new environment, May Jones joined the church again, which was very important to her. She wanted to pass this dimension of life on to her children, as she received it from her grandmother, so that they can be *"good people."* For the very poor, to belong to a religion is often an important sign of their dignity and a factor in their social integration, even if practicing their faith is sometimes difficult because of their conditions of life. In this case, it is essentially within the family that religious feelings are expressed and passed on to the children.

6. The family as a place for an economics of survival and solidarity.

Extreme poverty forces every member of the family to assume responsibilities which do not always correspond to the experience of other families and which can sometimes harm their own development. Where the man is no longer in a position to ensure the protection and security of his family, this role devolves on the wife and children. Frequently, in a poor community, all the members contribute towards economic security, even if only through small sub-contracting jobs or homebased crafts in which the children participate, picking up real skills in the process. Sometimes these skills are limited to unrecognized areas like the salvage of waste products, or to small trades and crafts which are well on the way to disappearing altogether. In Poeng's and Doña Matilda's families, the children join in the fight for survival in various small ways, sometimes illicitly, and even participate in their mother's more organized activities. Poeng hopes very much to carry on with her daughter Pimpa the business she started with her own mother.

And yet, these children and young people are confronted with responsibilities which are too heavy for them: the need to find money and to be of use to their families can lead them into delinquency, prostitution or drugs, and seriously compromise their health and education. No doubt they often feel the positive aspects of being "the ones who can be relied on." But will they risk compromising their future by continuing to support parents whose suffering and exhaustion they can clearly see?

Where life and external forces have not separated the generations, the grandparents play their role in the "economic unity" of the family. Sometimes they may be "extra mouths to feed," but often they contribute to the family's budget. They might have a pension they share with the rest of the family, or they look after the children while the parents are working. For example, Carrie Robinson brought up three of her grandchildren. Poeng's mother was the originator of a lucrative project which could have given the family a role in the shantytown if it had lasted.

Lastly, the family network can open the way to an active life. Jean Yanogo told young people who wanted to launch a small business or a craft enterprise that they would not succeed unless they restored contacts with their family. Only the family can provide the network of relationships which they need in order to find customers. The family can also act as a channel for young people to start working: we can see this with the Hirts. But when the family withdraws from the circles of active life it can no longer take this role, and young people whose lack of education has marginalized them find themselves in a vacuum that relief organizations cannot easily overcome. What hope is there for a child's future? Who will he look to as a role model, if he grows up in a family living in a housing project where two adults in three are out of work and the best part of people's earning comes from state aid?

The very poor draw our attention to the danger of a society which denies its poor young people an active role, pushing them into despair, resignation or delinquency. They also remind us that many young people living extremely deprived lives feel solidarity with their families and communities, and are ready to mobilize for them. Their participation in development programs is significant, the more so if it gives them the opportunity to achieve recognition and qualifications.

7. Is the family an obstacle or a springboard for its members' social advance?

a) Roles within the family.
Poeng and Doña Matilda can only sporadically count on the support of a man, and they have to be both father and mother. But does this mean that they should be defined as single-parent families? Are they not rather women who are continually prevented from forming the couple which they aspire to? This distinction is important, for it is common to hear about "matriarchal" families and "absent" fathers. In fact, most of the time the men are present, but they are not visible socially, whether through their own choice or not.

Are children and young people being deprived of a paternal model? There is no doubt that this is partly true. However, relationships are maintained wherever possible, and the women keep a place for these men in the life of the family. Some Haitian families, reflecting on the role of the father, said that when things are going badly it is the woman who goes in search of means to survive by selling some mangoes, a piece of soap or a sheet of metal from the roof; while the man, if he is living at home, replaces her in the house, ironing school uniforms for the children and so on. If he has left, his interventions in the life of his family will only be sporadic, and occur particularly when he has a little money. Yet he is the one who continues to personify, in a way, the determination that the children should be educated and learn a trade.

The importance of uncles and aunts (for example for Carrie Robinson or Doña Matilda when they were children) should also not be neglected, nor that of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, when contact with them has been maintained. Poeng sees a real hope of advance for the family when the grandmother comes to live in the shantytown and launches a small business. When Pimpa, as an adolescent, no longer feels at home in the shantytown she goes to her grandmother's for a few months. While Carrie's courage in bringing up three of her grandchildren is admirable, questions remain about the daughters whom she is replacing, and about the maternal image which is being passed to the children.

b) Is the very poor family an obstacle to personal development?
It is true that a family which is very shut in on itself in order to cope with extreme poverty can become a veritable ghetto. When a young person is moving up socially, he or she is often confronted sooner or later with an alternative: to continue advancing, and thereby break the links of solidarity with his or her family and community, or to abandon his or her ambitions altogether. Two pressures in fact lead to this situation: one from the young person's family, who may fear seeing him or her enter a strange new world and be contemptuous of it. And one from the new environment, which effectively discredits his or her own background. What is really needed is for any individual advance to go hand in hand with the advance of the family and of the milieu or the community of which it forms a part; hence the importance of community development in very deprived areas.

Nobody nowadays would deny the influence of family and background on a child's educational opportunities. But it is striking, even in countries where paying schools are still a place of privilege, to see how very deprived families are the first to aspire to an education for their children "so that they don't lead the same life as we did." In this way the cultural and socioeconomic deficit is counterbalanced by the strength of their aspiration and persistence. It has been shown[4] that the provision of nursery education in very disadvantaged communities can greatly reduce the effects of a low cultural level and poor living conditions all the more so when this is done with the agreement and collaboration of parents. It is even more important that parents should be involved in their children's education if there is a great distance between family and school environments.

8. Community as a channel for development.

The purpose of every family is that all its members be able to personally fulfill themselves and to contribute to the fulfillment of the world. The family plays an intermediary role between the person and the community. In his last conference Father Joseph Wresinski forcefully recalled that family is a learning place about relationships among men and women, about commitment to others, about taking into account the weakest. All these experiences prepare for citizenship. But as a corollary the family needs an environment of solidarity in order to exist.

No family is able to carry out alone all of its different functions—biological, emotional, economic, social, cultural, spiritual and judicial. For the poorest families, links with the community are vital. In extreme cases isolation can lead to death. In the developing countries, it is often only the family or the community which ensures people's survival because states have too few resources to do it.

The very poor family left by itself risks locking its members into what is expedient for survival and self defense. More than anything, it needs to be part of a community and of a social environment which provide it with basic security and a support network. The most disadvantaged family needs to fit into an environment where people expect some participation from it: the extended family, the village community, and the shantytown. Finally, the only social environment which the very poor family can belong to is that of other families, often as deprived as itself. Relationships are sometimes marked by violence due to misery, but at least people speak the same language, endure the same sufferings, sustain the same hopes, feel a part of the same humanity. Therefore, the family will be able to become an active agent of development in this social milieu.

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[4] See especially on this subject the Wresinski Report: Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security already quoted.

The parents' yearning for their children's instruction sustained by the community can become a valuable source of development, especially if the distance between the family circle and the school is great. Actions taken inside the community and with its help have the advantage of not arousing defensive attitudes and fear. When learning becomes the affair of the whole group, and has the agreement and collaboration of all the generations, the family no longer needs to feel guilty and humiliated, but can find a sense of pride. Everyone's energy becomes directed towards the children's progress. And the children, as they progress, no longer have the feeling that they are betraying their community, but feel that they are carrying out the community's work and contributing usefully to it.

What communities do we meet in the monographs? In the monographs from Guatemala and Thailand there are examples of this role being taken by the village or local district. For the U.S. family it is the farm, with an all-powerful boss and the agricultural workers who depend on him. When families gravitate towards the town, what will they find? Homelessness and shantydwelling. The shantytown can conceal very different realities: it can be a place where families end up after being driven out from the dynamic center of an expanding city, as seems to be the case with Poeng, or on the other hand a stage in what seems to be an active social progression between a rural past and an urban dream. Perhaps this applies to Doña Matilda. Sometimes whole villages migrate together, and the community relationships are preserved. In the families under consideration here, the network of solidarity and recognition has to be recreated in a context in which people are continually obliged to change their neighborhood. Sometimes the neighborhood protects, defends, supports; sometimes it discredits.

Like New York City's Lower East Side district where migrants came to live, the shantytown however sordid it is, conforms more or less to an urban model, in which private or public structures and services fulfill some of the functions of the family or the village: schools, clinics, child-care facilities and so on.

These communities give a relative degree of protection both to families and individuals, but they risk becoming ghettoes in their turn if they are isolated from the wider environment which only regards them pejoratively. This could bring about social or racial segregation which is at the origin of so much violence.

Actions taken inside the community and with its approval do not awaken fear or defensive attitudes, which sometimes create interference from outside. Moreover in the United States and Guatemala, the monographs show how much participation on committees or other actions in the neighborhood can be a source of pride. Unfortunately these initiatives often go unrecognized and do not last. Low income families are so caught in the difficulties of daily life that they have no time or energy to devote to outside activities or they become discouraged and lose interest. Also sometimes, outside authorities come along with their own plan and destroy what the residents have undertaken.

The actions undertaken by the Volunteers, although they come from the outside, are not perceived as placing the neighborhood in danger because of the commitment of those who sponsor and carry them out, and because they rely on the members of the community. This is the case in the Street Libraries mentioned in the monographs. They target not only the children, but the entire neighborhood. Doña Matilda and Poeng participate as well.

Many children and young people feel at one with their family and neighborhood and have proven it when they organized activities for the whole neighborhood. In the Street Libraries of Thailand, New York and Guatemala, in the "Courtyard of a hundred trades"[5] in Burkina Faso, there are examples of young people who, because they want to bring knowledge to their younger brothers and sisters, find the courage to take up courses of study which had never been available to them. And the community can open the way to a concern for the country. For example, several NGOs have found that if children living on the streets were trusted and given the means, they were capable of contributing to a national effort: planting trees against desertification, producing educational material for nursery schools, joining their compatriots in the construction of a railway and so on.

9. The family and socio-educational services: partnership.

In turn, the community risks becoming a ghetto if it is isolated from the wider environment: the schools, day-care centers, clinics, associations, unions, parishes, town government, cultural center. . . Access to a wider social fabric is difficult for the poorest families. Still, they more than others need to be able to participate actively. To do so, they need people to commit themselves to them for an indefinite time, to identify with them in their living situation, to know what they are feeling, to support them in the exercise of their responsibilities.

For Doña Matilda, the support services in her environment mean the nursery or the school, for Poeng the pre-school of the bonzes or the institution attended by Pyra. For the Hirts or the Jones it is particularly the child protection service, numerous other social services, the various schools which the children go to, or the professional training institutions. We saw that Doña Matilda's participation in the nursery became impossible when the hygiene standards were raised, and no one came to ask her why her children no longer attended.

When her son Pyra was arrested and placed in a home, Poeng did not ask herself, *"is this an opportunity for him to be educated and learn a trade?"* but instead, with the help of other families, immediately took steps to free him. It was not because she had no wish for him to be educated, but because it was more important that he was back with his family, and through it found an identity as a free child.

Like many poor families in industrialized countries, the Hirts led a large part of their family life under the scrutiny of these services. One can ask how far this leaves them a freedom to exercise their responsibilities or helps them towards autonomy. Even the way they dress their young daughter—too well—is criticized, without a thought being given to why this pretty white dress is being worn on a farm where it can so easily get dirty. What statement is the family making through this sign?

Thus, there is often deep misunderstanding between socio-educational services and very poor families. The professionals often establish a relationship which is based on the conviction that they alone are in possession of certain knowledge which it is their task to dispense. If families are to become actors and partners, they need recognition both of the way they live and of the things which are of fundamental importance to them.

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[5] Courtyard of a hundred trades, see glossary

Families in extreme poverty are constantly showing us how much they need a community; not only because they are looking for help from it, but also because they find in it the possibility (often the only one) of taking part in it.

10. Identity through association with others, speaking out and being represented.

In 1977 Father Joseph Wresinski reminded us what it means for families living in extreme poverty to be consistently reduced to silence.

> . . . What humiliates families is that opinion takes no account of them, that opinion accepts the conditions they live under. And who in fact defends them in the face of this injustice? Which group is opposing this injustice?

Even worse than hunger, instability or destitution is this feeling of not existing for other people, except as a problem to be solved or shelved.

Representative agencies for families still do not exist in all countries. Furthermore, where they do exist it is difficult for them to make the most vulnerable heard because they express themselves with great difficulty. Their basic preoccupation involves acquiring what other families already have. Enabling poor people to speak out requires a real practice on the part of those who speak and those who listen.

The associative or union life is very absent from the life of the very poor. The only allusion in the monographs is participation in the Fourth World Movement. In this case, each of the families has proven its capacity to reflect and to act with others and sometimes for them. As for the Hirts, they have found in it a new direction in their life and Doña Matilda is the heart of all the animation about October 17th[6]. Doña Matilda, like Mrs. Hirt, talks about her life in order to be witness of her milieu. All the families known for thirty-eight years by the Fourth World Movement have shown that real change for them began the day they were able to exercise a role for others. To be useful to others, to one's relatives, to one's community, to one's country is the dream, perhaps the greatest one, of families in dire poverty.

The question of representation is not addressed as such in the monographs. But it is clear that the families' principal driving force, as they make this considerable effort to talk about their life and risk being noticed by a social environment which is not always favorable towards them, is to "bear witness, so that the same thing doesn't happen again to other people."

Doña Matilda finds the time and energy to initiate the staging of a show by shanty-dwellers on the commemoration day of October 17, 1992. Mrs. Hirt joins the Fourth World Movement delegation to Rome in a wheelchair, not to speak of her own suffering, but of families who are poorer than she is. When thousands of families make such enormous efforts on the 17th of each month, and especially the 17th of October, to demonstrate with others their rejection of poverty and their determination to destroy it, is this not a clear expression of how much they want to be heard and to ally themselves with humanity's great struggles?

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[6] October 17, see glossary

11. Very poor families, full participants in human rights.

The poorest have taught us that their single strength, in the present and for the future, is to be able to live with their family, to fight for their children. To live as a family, to form lasting bonds with others, never to give up hope, to defend or protect the less fortunate; all these are ways of declaring one's membership in the human race and one's rejection of the dehumanizing inevitability of poverty.

Because they have so much to show us about dignity, fraternity, solidarity, law and justice, very poor families participate in and defend human rights, even if official texts are still a long way from what they actually experience.

The very poor reject poverty, but they have an absolute need of other people to break free of it. And as a corollary, no one, having learned what they have to suffer day after day, can refer to human rights and accept that certain people should be prevented, through poverty, from exercising freely and fully the fundamental right to live as a family.

In 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski, addressing the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, was already asking that the poorest be taken seriously as partners.

> Surely it is by taking the poorest as partners and allies that we would have the best chance of advancing in our understanding of indivisibility of the rights and the responsibilities, not just in the life of each individual person, but also in the overall existence of all humanity. The poorest truly demonstrate that it is not just the individual person but humanity as a whole which is indivisible, linked by one and the same destiny.

On October 17, 1987, a stone in honor of the victims of extreme poverty and of those who fight to destroy it was erected at the Trocadero in Paris in front of a hundred thousand defenders of human rights. Since then, on each October 17, thousands of the poorest families world-wide living in African bush, in a cemetery in Manila, in Berlin, Paris. . . assemble no matter what it costs in order to demonstrate with others their refusal of extreme poverty and their will to destroy it. In 1992, the United Nations instituted October 17 as the International day for the Eradication of Poverty, taking an appreciable step in order to engage other countries to join with them.

Whereas poverty continues and is increasing in certain countries, the hope of the poorest awakens the poor and the rich everywhere: do they not they carry a message capable of unifying everyone in a real plan for civilization which takes into account all human beings?

STRATEGIES INSPIRED BY FAMILIES LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

> *Every family carries a message of love to convey to the world. Every child, whether rich or poor, carries a message for the future. Every family and every child has an invaluable meaning for their milieu and for all of humankind.*
>
> *Father Joseph Wresinski*

It is almost impossible to create a political strategy acceptable to all member states of the United Nations because each country has very different economic and cultural conditions. The list of recommendations below might more accurately be termed principles. They are drawn not only from monographs but also from conversations with very poor families from several continents, from the experience of these families as well as that of individual NGOs committed to their advancement.

These recommendations also include elements of general policy which take the very poor family into account. They are based on the Wresinski Report (see Appendix III). The conclusion suggests some initiatives that fall within the U.N.'s responsibilities.

BASIC PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE FAMILY

1. Living as a family: an intangible fundamental freedom.

It is to gain the right to live as a family that the poorest people invest available resources, demand to be recognized as equals, take action and make their voices heard.

This fundamental right is stated in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Every human being who has reached marriageable age has the right to found a family which, as the natural and fundamental element of society, is entitled to the protection of society and the state."

The Article specifies "without any restriction of race, nationality or religion." Families who live in extreme poverty take our understanding of this intangible right one step further. They believe a precarious economic and social situation cannot be invoked against the right to create a family and bring up children. If this were not true, living as a family would no longer be a right but the privilege of a select few.

2. The family is the origin of a person's identity, especially of his or her name. All families must be approached, respected and protected as such.

The family is the place where its members first receive **social identity**: it provides them with attachment to a village, an ethnic group and a nation, and places them in history. This presupposes that people recognize the exercise of citizenship as indispensable. Citizenship attaches the person or the family to the local community, provides them with civic or social rights and entitles them to rely on the solidarity of this community.

Yet the family identity of the very poor is not merely a legal issue. The family is also the place where **love becomes a social act, a statement** which occurs over a period of time. This statement needs to be recognized and supported by the community.

Moral or cultural prejudices often deny poor families any respect, or label them pejoratively. Such discrimination against people simply because they are poor should be forbidden under sanction. (Article 7, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Finally, the family gives one **a name, a common memory and values** which help to make up one's identity, one's personal history and everything which constitutes a culture shared with other human beings.

Through the ages, the determination to eradicate whole peoples from the face of the earth has been implemented by the systematic destruction of any traces of their existence. For centuries, this has been the fate of the very poor. There can be no handing down of values nor any real social change if the memory of what the poorest families experience continues to be destroyed as radically as are the places where they live. This right to history and to memory, this rejection of oblivion which so many groups call for, is crucial to the poorest families but also to every state which wants to fight against chronic poverty.

3. Every family has the right to respect for its private life and its integrity.

Conditions of extreme poverty make protection of one's private life difficult. Housing is often excessively crowded. People who administer assistance programs often feel they have a right to inspect individuals and their intimate family life, a right which they sometimes grant themselves arbitrarily. In the belief that they have no rights, the poorest families often feel that they are presumed guilty and have no defense against such abuse.

4. The freedom to have children, and the means to raise them.

One of the vital functions of a family is procreation. For the poorest families, bringing a child into the world creates hope, even if it means an extra burden of anxiety. They often say, *"for my child it will be different."* They want their families to be recognized with others as basic units of society, the guarantee of its renewal. Society must perceive their children not as a burden, but as a promise for the future, a priority to which society must commit itself. "A society which does not commit itself to its children is a dying society," said Father Joseph Wresinski.

A child's first protection against poverty is his or her parents and those nearest to the child. Every effort must be made to maintain or re-establish this protection which also roots the child in his or her identity. This is true for children whom circumstances have forced to relinquish the protection of their families to attempt to survive on their own, as well as for those whom social services have placed in the care of specialized children's organizations. People often suspect that families in chronic poverty are incapable of bringing up their children; yet instead of increasing the number of foster care places, an approach which creates enormous financial expenditures and great human suffering, would it not be better to work with the parents to find out how they might best be supported in carrying out their responsibilities?

Poor children have an essential request: "*Give our parents the means to bring us up.*" They remind us of the inter-dependence of rights such as housing and education, and therefore of the need for a comprehensive policy. The state must ensure that all families have what they need to be responsible for themselves. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares a coresponsibility between parents and government for children's education.

5. Every family needs the support of a community.

The family, especially the poorest ones, must be able to count on the solidarity of its close community and its broader environment. Just as each person needs a family, each family needs a community, and the community needs a social environment if it is not to become a ghetto incapable of developing its members. The family's attachment to the community is not just an ideal. In areas of extreme poverty it is an immediate and pressing necessity.

In a world in the throes of social change, the community is an irreplaceable intermediary between human beings and these changes. The most deprived are often on the front lines where the effects of such changes are felt. Apart from the family and the community there is scarcely any other forum where they can freely express their dignity and their reflections, keep alive the values which give meaning to their lives, and join others in taking the risks involved in new ways of living.

People often suspect that deprived communities are a source of bad influence or danger. Urban renovation policies tend to destroy them, isolating the poorest families from other people like them. However it is within its social environment, no matter how deprived it may be, that every family will be able to become a driving force in a country's development.

Chronic poverty attacks culture. But experience has shown that even populations which have suffered from extreme poverty over several generations still retain great reserves of intelligence and the capacity for invention. The very poor demand more than simple practical knowledge: they aspire to set all the faculties of human intelligence and creativity to work. This implies that those who work with them will have to draw on the knowledge and skills of the entire community.

The poorest families wish to have access to the means of advancement common to everyone, in particular schooling. It is important for the parents, even when they are extremely deprived, to be associated with any educational project which concerns their children. Increasing contact between the family and the school is necessary for success. Special training of teachers and other socio-cultural workers is an important way of increasing this contact.

Maintaining or restoring a social and community fabric around families seems to be indispensable, especially for the most underprivileged among them, so that they can participate in the growth both of other family members and of their countries.

The modern urban world has invented other modes of social belonging (associations, trade unions, parishes, municipalities, cultural centers, etc.). This social network which completes or replaces the community is difficult for the most deprived families to penetrate. And yet it is they who need most to take an active role in it. Particular attention should be paid to enabling them to gain confidence, to find their place and to rely on the support of other members in this social partnership. In the end this is the only way for the poorest families to escape from institutional care and assume their own independence.

THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOUNDED ON THE FAMILIES' PARTICIPATION

> *No further attempt at legislation or regulation should be made without raising the question "where and in what condition are the poorest people now, and where will they be in a year, two years, ten years time?" . . . The way people treat motherhood and fatherhood among the poorest reveals the way our civilization values childhood, motherhood and fatherhood.*
>
> *Father Joseph Wresinski*

1. Combating the chronic poverty of families: a national and international priority.

The extreme poverty affecting these families is dramatic because it conditions tomorrow's generations by forcing children to grow up without the skills for their advancement. In this sense, combating chronic poverty must become a priority in every policy aimed at a country's economic, democratic and cultural development. On the other hand, the very poor family carries within itself the seeds of resistance and endurance. Approaches based on this family-centered view are more effective that alternative approaches that attempt to reduce the poorest to partial or temporary problems.

2. A comprehensive policy.

Because the very poor family has been so hard hit by poverty in all aspects of its life, because it is committed to the future through its children, it compels us to create a long-term comprehensive policy. This policy should reach all families in all aspects of life, including those which determine the choices a country makes for its development and its relations with other countries.

A comprehensive policy will also involve all citizens, including the poorest, so that the future of the country will be built with them, starting from what they teach. It is unreasonable for a country to deprive itself of the experience and reflections of one section of its population, particularly if this section is the most vulnerable and thus the best placed to indicate priorities which should be selected and the dangers which threaten its entire population.

The Wresinski Report develops this approach to a comprehensive policy, including:
- basic securities necessary for family life;

- access to, and participation in, the means of development: education, instruction, culture, professional training;
- representation in the judicial system and in social, civil, and political life;
- partnership. (A summary of the Wresinski Report is in Appendix III.)

From the monographs it should be noted in particular that all the measures above should be studied with a view to protecting and making use of family, community and social dynamics, rather than supplanting them.

3. Partnership with the poorest.

Experience has shown that while the very poor need assistance in order to end the chronic poverty that holds them prisoner, if this assistance is not to crush them, they must be considered the principal actors in their liberation. Anything which robs them of their responsibilities, decides for them, treats them as children or sanctions them is nothing but violence in disguise. Such measures only serve to accentuate their marginalisation. Participation of the very poor is all the more difficult to achieve in any ongoing fashion when they have been scarred by human misery over several generations.

If we want to take account of the hopes, thoughts and ongoing efforts of the most deprived families, to give the floor to people who have had to hide and keep quiet to preserve their integrity, we will have to change our way of doing things. When their community is recognized as a source of positive identity, then the very poor can find important ways of developing communication and actions reaching out to all. Building mutual trust presupposes that the families can learn to express themselves and work with others. It also assumes people with extensive training who are prepared to make a long-term commitment at their side.

4. Ongoing evaluation of programs and policies based on the poorest families' experience.

By definition, the poorest people are those most difficult to reach and to keep in a development project or a dialogue. If there is not an initial and explicit determination to reach them, to allow oneself to be affected by them, to watch constantly for forms of exclusion which threaten them, the demand for short term efficiency will quickly shift attention and efforts away from the poorest.

Continuous evaluation can detect exclusion and shed light on a family's progress even if it does not always correspond with predetermined objectives. Such evaluations can also be a source of creativity, bringing out the value of those whose action in the family, the community or the environment may be very discrete but nonetheless vital in the struggle against extreme poverty.

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of programs, measures and policies, that takes the most disadvantaged families as a point of reference results in new rules of life in society, some of which may be of universal relevance.

5. Developing knowledge which brings recognition to families.

No policy aimed at reaching and promoting the most disadvantaged families will work in the absence of real knowledge about them. This includes traditional research on their number and unstable life conditions, but also includes a knowledge of their expectations, their aspirations, and the strengths which they contribute to the development process.

This knowledge cannot be the work of scientists alone: it must include all people involved with the families and the families themselves. As long as the extremely poor depend exclusively on other people's opinion of them, they will remain prisoners of definitions such as "homeless" or "single-parent families" which correspond to assistance programs designed for them. Only when they state who they are, can they free themselves. The international community should recognize, support and encourage this type of knowledge.

This knowledge ought to enable very poor families to get their bearings again within their own history. There can be no handing down of values nor any real social change, if the memory of what they experience continues to be denied or destroyed.

6. People and time.

> *Extreme poverty is the work of human beings, only human beings can destroy it.*
>
> *Father Joseph Wresinski*

In order to understand the poorest families' way of perceiving reality, it is necessary to know and to respect them in the context of their history of suffering and resistance. This implies that men and women join with them and take the time to restore mutual trust. The 1990 Forum of NGOs mentions on this topic:

> . . . people who make an unconditional, long-term commitment. When chronic poverty has lasted too long and when survival strategies are part of the history of families and groups, every change carries with it an additional threat of insecurity. For the very poor, these threats multiply and increase to a point where it seems senseless to incur them. Advice and teaching skills are not enough to enable them to believe in change and to take the risks of making a commitment to it. They need at their sides people whom they can trust and who will be there to share in difficulties, discouragements, desertions, and fresh starts which will blaze the trail toward change.

Building a family is a long-term project. Programs cannot be subject to the fluctuations of politics and the economy. They must be based on a shared vision of what poor families want to achieve.

The time factor has to be taken into account, as much for research as for action. Many programs, for reasons of effectiveness, limit their activities to a short period. However the worst thing one could do would be to start a project with an underprivileged population only to abandon it half-way from the end. For the families and everyone else involved, there will be feelings of failure and frustration and they both will be led to give up any idea of trying again.

The results of a project's first years are generally not very spectacular. This is a time when people get to know each other. This helps build friendship which will be the focal point of a common project starting from the wishes of the families. It is often during this initial stage that innovations spring up in impoverished areas which representatives of organizations and agencies may not notice. Few international organizations are ready to finance this period so vital to building relations of trust with families who have too many problems to participate right away in highly structured programs. The final stage is just as crucial. Only a broad-based evaluation with everyone involved in the project, and not a set of requirements dictated by funding organizations, can tell us when people accompanying these families can leave without throwing them into a state of unmanageable confusion.

PROPOSED UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS

1. Ensuring representation of the poorest families in all public debates and decision-making procedures.

At the first international Fourth World family congress in 1976, these families had an opportunity to state their point of view, as the following text shows.

> *As families of the Fourth World, we live in societies that still sometimes do not give us the right to speak out: they deal with us without ever asking our opinion. . . . This world must change, but not without taking into account our ideas and our experiences. To discover how to become a world of democracy, justice and equality, people must also be aware of the extent of prevalent injustice: they must understand exclusion. And who can better explain this than we ourselves? Who can demonstrate the efforts to get rid of exclusion, if not those who have suffered from it for so long?*[1]

Groups representing these families do not yet exist in all countries. Even in those places where they do exist, they often represent families from widely differing socio-cultural backgrounds. It is therefore difficult for them effectively to represent the most vulnerable who have the most difficulty in expressing themselves and whose main priorities in life are things other families take for granted.

The difficulties poor people experience could happen to anyone. Their experiences concern all citizens. They must be adequately represented both at a national and international level, not only to express their own interests, but also to warn all families of the dangers that could confront them. But such representation cannot be guaranteed by conventional means of power sharing. This representation will occur only if others share the kind of knowledge discussed above which enables poor families to feel that their own value is acknowledged. This representation requires a real determination within individual states and the United Nations.

There is not yet any branch of the United Nations specifically concerned with the family, nor is there one dealing with the fight against poverty. Following the recent International Year of the Family, should we not be asking ourselves the following question: ought there not be a permanent body concerned with the family, within which the poorest families could be properly represented?

a) A United Nations body concerned with the family.

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[1] The International Movement ATD Fourth World, "The families of the Fourth World speak out" (International Congress of Fourth World Families 4/5 December 1976.) Pierrelaye. Ed. Science et Service 1976.

The need to study, implement and evaluate the facts and strategies pertaining to the family, and to encourage state policies in this field, suggests the need for a permanent United Nations agency dealing with the problems of the family, including the poorest.

b) The need to encourage nations to develop comprehensive policies which take account of the family.
In national politics, the family plays only a small role, as is often shown by the way entitlement programs for families and children work. The poorest families have made it clear that they expect to be treated like actors and partners in all political matters, not only housing, education and health, but also other national and international questions. Within the context of the family, we must value the whole person. Vigilance and regular initiatives from the United Nations would motivate nations to implement policies created with the help of the poorest families.

The United Nations could bring about a world-wide information exchange which would foster an in depth knowledge of the poorest families' situation so that they could play an active role in matters which concern them. Such as exchange could also provide a periodic assessment of how plans targeting these families affect them.

2. Developing an understanding of human rights from the point of view of the poorest families.

The poorest people point out a pre-requisite to human rights when they request, first and foremost, a recognition of their own sense of dignity, the means to get along with people and to create a family, the opportunity to be useful and to help others. Before even mentioning rights at all, the very poor want people to recognize that "Every person is a human being" or, "Zo kwe zo" as they say in the Republic of Central Africa. And therefore everyone is part of the human family. This might seem self-evident: but when one sees what the Doña Matildas and the Poengs of this world have to endure, as do their children, one has to reexamine the basic meaning of the term "humanity."

The family is the first place, sometimes the only place, where the very poor have something in common with the rest of humanity. Approaching the problems caused by extreme poverty via the family compels us to question the significance of the human race as a whole, with its rights responsibilities, relationships and achievements. The family also leads us towards a shared future and a common destiny. When we consider the very poor as families, we must recognize them as full–fledged citizens with equal rights and as partners in the human race. This family reality forces us to become aware of the inseparability of all human values, and so of the inseparability of human rights.

In 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski, addressing the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and opening the debate on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty," brought to the international talks some new spokespersons whose experiences and opinions had never before been voiced or heard.

In his speech entitled, "The Poorest Teach Us the Indivisibility of Human Rights," he demonstrated that for those living in extreme poverty, there is not a question of defending one category of rights rather than another. Deprived of economic, social and cultural rights, it is not possible to exercise civic and political rights. If one has no civic and political rights, it becomes almost impossible to regain the economic, social and cultural ones. Human rights apply to all people and must be exercised by everyone.

> . . . For the poorest, it appears that only a campaign to have all human rights respected can safeguard their human dignity. Is it not precisely our preoccupation with the achievement of now one category of human rights, now another, that has made us lose sight of what ought to be the very purpose and raison d'être of all these rights, namely, the recognition of the inalienable dignity of every human being? . . . In the name of what definition of the human being does a person have absolute rights? On what basis can those rights be withdrawn? Are these not the basic questions addressed to our declarations and conventions by those who have but their humanity and not a single visible supplementary achievement to offer in return for the rights allotted?
>
> . . . That is a harrowing question for those who are prepared to listen, for it is dictated by a concept of the human person which the very poor themselves refuse to relinquish . . .
>
> . . . The indivisibility of rights and responsibilities is also something that the poor of the world remind us of in practical, irrefutable terms. Surely it is by taking the poorest as partners and allies that we would have the best chance of advancing in our understanding of that indivisibility, not just in the life of each individual person but also in the overall existence of all humanity. The poorest truly demonstrate that it is not just the individual person but humanity as a whole which is indivisible, linked by one and the same destiny.

3. The need to cultivate fraternity among nations.

The implementation of human rights should encourage connections between people and governments rather than provide a basis for judging or condemning others. When a nation, or a family, cannot attain the ideals of human rights, how can we create a sense of shared responsibility and resources and a framework of mutual help, without these being felt as a thinly disguised form of coercion or an abuse of power? International aid sometimes imposes certain constraints on the poorest families, not only in the field of population control, but also regarding the basic right to bring up their own children. It should no longer be possible to attempt to solve problems by sending children who have natural parents to households or countries that are wealthier, thereby avoiding the vital issue of a fair and equitable division of resources and development. This holds true both at the national and international level.

The United Nations can encourage positive links between the haves and have-nots, enabling them to know and recognize each other and to work together as equal partners at all levels of nations, groups, families or individuals. Poverty concerns everyone, especially when it affects families with children. The determination to eradicate it could be the foundation of a world wide accord.

By recognizing October 17[2] as the "World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty," the United Nations has made a significant step towards involving nations in the acknowledgment of the need for a fight against poverty, a need which was first of all identified by the poorest themselves. This day can become, for the whole world, a time when all human beings renew their commitment alongside the most underprivileged of their fellow citizens.

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[2] October 17, see glossary

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AND GETTING TO KNOW FAMILIES IN EXTREME POVERTY

1. Understanding poor families in light of the Wresinski Report.[1]

Our knowledge of the situation facing families who live in extreme poverty and in the conditions of insecurity which lead to it is as yet sketchy and incomplete. It is not at all easy to visualize what this situation is like merely on the basis of statistical criteria or administrative categories used by governments or international organizations and institutions. Part one of Father Joseph Wresinski's report to the French Economic and Social Council summarizes the extent of such knowledge available in France in 1986. (See Appendix III)

The types of knowledge analyzed included *"population categories and statistics as sources of information that may be used as a basis for political action,"*[2] special studies in *"resources, housing and education as indicators of extreme poverty and insecurity,"*[3] *"an investigation into a particular neighborhood, painting a portrait of extreme poverty there,"*[4] *"knowledge acquired through action, aimed at changing the living conditions of the people concerned,"*[5] and finally the monograph approach which is taken further in this report.

2. The lack of statistics about the very poor.

International authorities have various means at their disposal to assess the extent of poverty, in particular statistics issued by governments or estimates made by United Nations agencies on the basis of programs or policies implemented. But even when these official figures are reliable, it is rarely possible to use them to make comparisons, and they are not always available. *"The very nature of certain types of statistics affects their reliability,"* said the UNICEF Yearbook for 1986. The authors quote the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which in 1983 recommended caution in reading its statistics, particularly for the purposes of comparing one country with another, since the various economic indicators were not applied in the same way in every country. Statistics on social aspects, income distribution, etc. are especially liable to error. To sum up, it is only possible to speak of "trend indicators." Furthermore, as can easily be imagined, it is precisely in the poorest countries that the information is least reliable. And within these countries, the poorest population groups are the most difficult to register as they are the most mobile, the furthest removed from modernization, literacy, and the various centers (e.g., health centers) where registration takes place.

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[1] Wresinski Report, see Appendix III

[2] This part of the Wresinski Report deals with the national statistics provided by government departments and by French national statistical bodies.

[3] Studies produced by public and private bodies in these various sectors of activity.

[4] The example cited in the report is: Editions Quart-Monde, 1986. *"Pauvreté-précarité économique. Enquete dans un quartier populaire de Caen."*

[5] For example: Rosenfeld, Jona M. *"Emergence from Extreme Poverty,"* Fourth World Movement Publications, 1989.

The various aspects of poverty may be assessed through certain criteria: income level, accommodation, work, education, food and health. Take for example the income criterion. Approaches based on average incomes or income distribution ranges will not be satisfactory for the purpose of assessing extreme poverty. They may enable us to pinpoint sets of population groups where the poorest are likely to be found; their income levels are very low, but then so are those of other neighboring population groups.

As for living conditions, it is possible to take the existence of shantytowns as a criterion for poverty. But a person knowing the situation from the inside will be aware that certain population groups that have immigrated from one country to another or from a rural area to the city find in the shantytown temporary protection from a society which they must attempt to join, though they may not be able to do so all at once. In the shantytown, community relationships are not broken up. These families eventually leave the shantytown with their heads held high, while still maintaining a network of relationships with their friends who constitute the community.

To others, the shantytown represents a refuge of last resort after years of running away and loosing all contact with their family, their village, and the people who could give them support. Thus the shantytown is an unreliable yardstick for assessing poverty, since it does not serve the same purpose for everybody, and can mean either a temporary expedient enabling people to work their way into a new environment or culture, or a lasting exclusion. When it comes to looking at poor families, more complications arise. The situation of families is generally measured in terms of figures, through tax statistics. But very poor families do not, of course, pay any direct taxes such as income taxes. In countries with a system of social and family benefits, families are counted by means of the family allowance figures, and the degree of poverty may become roughly apparent when assessment for these allowances takes income level into account.

Population surveys may also be used to describe families, but the number of children in a household is not an adequate indicator of the poverty level. Finally, using approaches based more on social factors, it is possible to determine the number of single-parent families, very often cited as one "category" of poor families, though this definition covers a multitude of different situations, and the majority of very poor families are not single-parent families.

Where would Poeng's family, who live in the poorest part of a Bangkok shantytown,[6] come into the picture. No representative of society has any contact with this mother. She will never be included in the statistics, either as a single parent, because that depends on her situation at a given moment, or as a shantytown dweller, because she pays her rent on a daily basis. Her children go to school only sporadically. Her approaches to health services are highly haphazard. If she were to be included in any statistical survey, one would have to be able to assess every factor enabling the family as a whole to develop: education projects for her children, everything in which she takes part, in particular the support network of relationships which exists, in spite of everything, with her mother, her neighbors and her old friends. With her partners, she manages to maintain a family, come what may. However, she does not conform to the patterns normally expected.

Present statistical methods do not seem capable of generating a real statement from which the number of families in the world who live in extreme poverty could be determined.

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[6] See the monograph from Thailand.

3. The statistical knowledge acquired depends on the policies we intend to implement. In practice, knowledge often exists about population groups for which a policy has been and is being implemented. Statistics are gathered about the degree of success of such policies. In other words, if a country has an education policy or a health policy, it will seek to get to know the population using variables which seem to have a bearing on these policies. If one thinks the response to poverty lies in providing soup kitchens and temporary housing, the knowledge one will gather is census data on the number of homeless people who could benefit from programs. The perception of what can be done and the enhancement of the information needed to do it are constantly interacting. The two aspects go hand in hand.

This implies two significant weaknesses in this type of knowledge. The first concerns completeness: since most of these policies do not reach the poorest over a long period of time, the policy makers therefore tend not to know them well. Second, the very nature of the information gathered serves to help implement these policies and often reveals little of the expectations or actions of the most impoverished members of the population groups themselves.

Finally, this particular approach determines the way in which the population group thinks it has to present itself and to react to what the programs offer: if special strategies are set up for single-parent families, the very poor may well in their turn try to adapt to these strategies and get themselves recognized as single-parent families. Some may be compelled to do so in order to qualify for assistance at all.

From the point of view of the birth rate, the pressure on poor people to have fewer children plays a part in the way they will use or reject policies set up to benefit children, especially as regards education and preventive health care.

4. A new form of research to pinpoint access to the daily experiences of the very poor. It is unrealistic to think that we shall immediately be able to get to know the poorest families everywhere better. But research could derive knowledge from some basic areas and put them back in a larger context to ensure that poor population groups are not described as marginal. The places would need to be chosen to assess different situations (e.g., urban and rural areas, developing and industrialized countries) where extreme poverty exists. If any investment is to be made in statistical research, it should focus on these limited areas, adopting a real strategy of reaching the poorest people and fighting extreme poverty.

Some statistical details are necessary, focused for example on a school or a neighborhood, if only to find out how many people there are and what resources need to be allocated to the task. The same resources will not be required, for example, for large and small geographical areas, for population groups that have been excluded for a long time, and for families in transit between country and city.

An investigation within a well-defined local area, also recommended by the Wresinski Report, results in a better understanding of, more importantly, ways insecurities can be linked together and coexist within families and even within a whole neighborhood. How do they eventually form a pattern which shapes a way of thinking and living that becomes common, not only to a single family but to a whole group of families who share similar conditions? It has been shown how greatly families living in insecurity are affected by deprivation, poor health, anxiety transmitted to children, the perpetual reality of waiting for something to turn up—a job, a regular income, help of some kind—or crises of all sorts. But also, how is there a place in the fight against poverty, for informal work, for mutual assistance, for shelters for the homeless, for celebration and for courage drawn from the presence of children in the household? Admittedly, depending on the country, this task needs to be tackled in greater depth, in order not only to deal with aspects like exclusion, loneliness and bad reputation, but also to overcome difficulties in appreciating the expressions of solidarity which strengthen the family, village, support groups, school, social services, etc.

While more statistically-based studies provide better information on the nature and cost of necessary policies, more local, qualitative research emphasizes the way in which these policies can be put into practice as well as existing strengths and weaknesses already present at the grass-roots level.

5. Knowledge from action.

The third approach results from grass roots programs, that is, the contribution of the families themselves and those who work with them. This provides an original and precious type of knowledge, although one which cannot easily be expressed in statistical terms.

If we want to reach the poorest people, we must adopt other criteria, which may be harder to quantify but which correspond more nearly to their daily lives and the efforts they make to turn their hopes into realities.

The document entitled "Reaching the Poorest,"[7] published by the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the UNICEF NGO Committee, highlights some common characteristics of the poor, found on several continents:

- displacement, chiefly noticeable in the places where they live, an insecure right to occupy land or housing, the type of dwelling, etc.;
- reputation and lack of respect, a bad name, the type of relationship not only with the organizations providing assistance, but also with the neighborhood, the immediate environment, institutions, the programs frequented by other children and families, etc.;
- resistance to poverty, which is more difficult to assess because it cannot be noticed from the outside like the factors mentioned above. The work done in order to survive by children, teenagers and adults may give some indication of this, as may family and neighborly relationships within the group;
- physical appearance, facial expressions, body language, gait, gestures, dentition, vocal expression;
- environmental aspects, what kind of lifestyle do amenities provided on the premises reveal?

These data are necessarily highly empirical since they are derived from the observation and experience of "people at the grass roots level" who have asked themselves how to reach the very poor, especially in countries where the poor are in the majority.

Displacement and nomadism can be seen and measured, even though people "who do not come from here" are not always included in census data. This is a crucial type of approach, compared with descriptions relying on generally accepted indicators. When we attempt to identify factors which are common between these various experiences, the income level is not so useful a guide as criteria such as nomadism or lack of respect, which cannot be expressed in statistical form.

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[7] International Movement ATD Fourth World, *"Reaching the Poorest"* UNICEF NGO Committee, 1990.

The Wresinski Report, an approach of this kind implemented in France, brought to light a number of essential points, such as:

- Food intake corresponds to the graph of available resources; it is often irregular and frankly inadequate.
- People are not lacking in aspiration to earn their living through odd jobs, but they do lack the most elementary means to do this.
- As regards consumption, the lower and more irregular the income, the more households fall into debt solely in order to survive, not to invest in new structures of family life that may open up new prospects. Families are constantly having to repay the loans they needed to survive in the past, and therefore cannot undertake any projects that might get them out of debt in the future.
- The cultural poverty of the families hinders their participation in political and social life and is not confined to literacy, schooling and training. This lack of culture is involved with the most basic values of existence, family, work, religion, social life or mere neighborliness, etc. The greater the lack of resources, the more the people involved suffer because of the gulf between their hopes and the reality of their lives. They are obliged to set their beliefs and aspirations aside, in order to endure their situation.
- The poorest families also remind us that access to the arts is an integral part of participation in the life of a community. Are not the more privileged neighborhoods a permanent witness to the fact that when a sense of beauty is stimulated and the noblest forms of expression are encouraged, chances of self-improvement are increased?

This type of knowledge reveals more directly the connections between different kinds of insecurity which are liable to result in situations of extreme poverty. But action also places the people concerned in a situation in which they are able to express themselves in other ways than through a survey. The aspirations and strengths which are the keys to success can then come to light.

It is useful to focus on getting to know the development strengths inherent in every family and the conditions which must obtain in order for them to flourish. This would answer the anxieties of people from developing countries who see that the modern world which they are facing breaks down family bonds and support systems within the community without putting anything in their place, overturning values and creating loneliness.

The poorest people in industrialized societies are already faced with divided families where the immediate happiness of the individual obscures the maintenance of the nuclear family. In many cases the nuclear family becomes a temporary community which no longer gives its members an unconditional guarantee of their identity, security and solidarity, and this doubtless explains the search for new communities and spiritual values.

Family and community serve as a buffer between the individual and changing society. What is needed to rebuild the basic community links? The modern world is challenged by scientific progress to devise a new ethic based on the means human beings have acquired to control life and death: the atomic bomb and extermination camps, and more recently genetic engineering and medically-assisted reproduction. For a number of years the modern world has been conscious of the need to maintain the planet in a condition in which it can continue to support life, hence the success of environmental movements. What impact does all this have on the poorest families? These are questions which must sooner or later be addressed.

6. Commitment, availability and permanence.

In order to contribute to this type of knowledge, a considerable investment is required in the form of individuals who are truly determined to reach the poorest people and have been trained to be ready to take part in their daily lives. This type of investment will give rise to a renewed vision of necessary policies, which will in turn affect statistical information gathered.

Commitment is very important for the poorest families when it comes to both working with them and getting to know them. The poorest families often do not present the same image to people who are available to commit themselves to them as they do to people who are not. If we consider only their needs, they are likely to present to us all the difficulties for which they might be offered help. But if we are to change their situation so that they can escape from an assistance mentality, we must take into account the things that they can do to help themselves. And for these things to come to light, the families need to be involved with partners who are anxious to bring them to light. This does not always happen. One team of social workers, for example, used to say, *"We will not do anything unless the impetus comes from the residents."* The result was that they did nothing, and no requests were forthcoming from the population.

However, a request is no easier to express when the action required is clearly defined. For example, in one mainstreaming project in France, a woman wanted to take her driving test. But the person she needed to ask was the social worker she only knew in the context of assistance and child care; she would never have dared tell her what she wanted to do, because in that context it was unthinkable for her to do so. These two examples of non-availability, or of availability not apparent to the population, illustrate how the poorest people can convey a highly truncated image of themselves.

Families need to meet people who are concerned and available before they will disclose their desires so that they can be fulfilled. This is what we mean by commitment. If partners are available, allowing themselves to be drawn into the life of the families, it means that when they express a desire to make a success of something, the partners will change their own actions to help them make a success of it. And it is clear that by so doing they will enable the people to reveal themselves in a different light.

It is impossible to get to know the very poor if they are seen in the light of criteria defined by others, if they exist only as poor people and are seen as "the needy" by those who specialize in fulfilling needs. Then they cannot be seen as active participants.

7. How to achieve objectivity.

Non-neutrality is essential if we are to get to know the poorest families, but it is not sufficient in itself. Here as elsewhere objectivity is a prerequisite of knowledge. Being committed to the families, trying to help them to succeed where they want to succeed, should not prevent us from standing back from the situation from time to time in order to describe what has been happening objectively. Objectivity assumes both knowing the facts as they are, and interpreting those facts in order to take action.

We must ensure that we have the means of achieving objectivity, of standing back from the qualitative things we are learning about the families.
In particular, we must:
- take time to listen to what the families are saying;

– try to distance ourselves from routine matters, conduct supplementary surveys or commission others to conduct them from a point of view which is not simply that of daily routine;
– identify individuals who ought to receive available services, but who are not currently being reached.

8. Encouraging aspirations.

Knowledge should imply recognition. It is important for the very poor to be able to recognize themselves, in a way that does not diminish them, in the attempts made to describe them. So long as the acquired information reduces poor people to categories, we may be certain that they will not be freed from their extreme poverty. Admittedly, we need to pinpoint where they are and describe the conditions in which they are living if we are to build up support systems around them. How can we do this in such a way that they are not "sidelined" from progress, competence and ability?

Take the schooling of children. The poor the world over know that education is one of the major keys to enable their children to escape from poverty. Some—for example Doña Matilda in the Guatemala monograph—make considerable efforts to send their children to school whenever they can. Others, in contrast, while affirming that they share this conviction, will do all they can to keep their children at home, and seem to regard school as a dangerous place. This was the case in the '60s, when Father Joseph Wresinski was engaged in his first work at the camp at Noisy-le-Grand in France. Fifty percent of the children in the camp did not go to school because their parents lived in fear that the authorities would take them away from them, and this often happened at school.

A deep aspiration for the children to learn clearly existed, but at the same time this more powerful reality prevented parents from doing what they ought to have done. It was first Father Joseph Wresinski who had to affirm this desire on the part of the parents, for he knew that every human being is anxious for his or her children to be educated. This was not specific to poor people, but he did find that the very poor shared this common human aspiration. The families recognized themselves in this struggle for education and finally, after years had gone by, the public authorities recognized their aspirations too.

9. Understanding the history, environment and overall situation of a population group.

Statistical information and knowledge resulting from activities with the very poor are thus inseparable. It is impossible to understand the statistics without seeing the people in context. It is impossible to realize that schooling is an aspiration of the poorest just by looking at the figures for school attendance and academic success. Very poor families can only express this aspiration when they have gained sufficient confidence in someone.

In order to make sense of observations, it is not sufficient merely to accumulate them; a particular fact observed must be set within its context, not just that of the family and its environment, but that of the population group in general.

Finally, the above example shows how knowledge of the poor must include them in the overall picture and recognize that they share deep aspirations which are common to all people. The basic question to be asked is not *"Do the poor really want to better themselves and have access to education?"* but *"How can very poor families play their part in attaining that education?"*

The definition of poverty in the Wresinski Report is very interesting, though difficult to formulate in statistical terms, because it speaks of responsibilities and obligations. One way of defining a population group in extreme poverty ought to be to ask whether it is still capable on its own of attaining its rights and meeting its obligations and maintaining its position within the network of rights and obligations.

The same idea is illustrated by our example of the shantytown or slum neighborhood, which for some people serves as a buffer between themselves and an unknown society—as in the case of the American family arriving in New York—and for others is the place they end up after being completely uprooted. The very poor have a background of which they are not always aware, in the struggle to survive from day to day. But it has given them a collective memory which also exists in society's attitudes and determines the stereotypes used to describe the very poor as well as methods of acquiring knowledge about them. If they are to emerge from extreme poverty, these two collective memories must be brought to light, so that in partnership with others a new one can be created.

For these reasons it is important to take the viewpoint of knowledge into account, along with the attitude of society to the poor; for it is this viewpoint which will contribute a degree of insight at a given moment, and at the same time it is this point of view which will be altered by a particular piece of knowledge which emerges at a given moment.

10. The very poor as partners in knowledge.

"Any policy of social development must be based on the life experiences of the very poor, their own view of their situations and their efforts to help each other," says the Wresinski Report. The same thing is at stake when it comes to research. Will it enable the poor to be more credible partners, or will their knowledge be ignored? The question which arises, and which concerns the United Nations too, is how to create a society together. We are convinced that society will open up to the poor only if they play a part in building it. So the question is how to build up a body of knowledge which will take into account the thinking ability of the very poor.

The originality in Father Joseph Wresinski's political thought is that he introduces dissension by saying, *"People in difficulties are nevertheless also free citizens, able to think for themselves."* In his view approaches must give equal consideration to the thinking of all people about their own experience.

This statement, that the poor are free and capable of thinking for themselves and that it is impossible to understand what their lives are like outside the personal, family, social and even political context of the societies to which they belong, transforms our approach. We act differently because we believe that the very poor have aspirations which it is our task to bring to the surface and which ought to result, not in specific policies, but in the questioning of all existing policies which have excluded them. When the very poor demand the wherewithal to live together in families, this means that all the policies intended to support families—education, access to health care, etc.—must be re-examined, and the family itself placed in the very center of all policy-making.

The experience of the Fourth World Movement and NGO teams does not say, *"So long as the policy remains the same, nothing can be done,"* but suggests to schools that they take families into partnership. If the school can accept that pupils have brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, and other people involved in their lives and networks, it will agree to listen to another way of thinking and speaking. When the very poor are true partners, the school's local policy will change, and this will have repercussions for the overall policy because the school will immediately find itself hemmed in by rules which are unsuited to the new approach. This new situation, which has come to the fore because of the new partners involved, may in turn lead either to a few amendments to deal with "special cases," or to a real change in the legislation. Here again, knowledge has a part to play in the representation of the very poor either as a marginal category, or as citizens who are hampered in the exercising of their responsibilities.

Building up a fund of knowledge in partnership with the very poor does not, then, mean collecting haphazard views from families on their lives or on programs. If we want to ensure that very poor families are closely associated with the decisions that affect them, we must be committed to giving them means to express themselves and reflect on their lives. Partnership is an essential ingredient in the success of this approach.

11. The monograph approach.

Extensive accounts of the lives, actions, thoughts, hopes and efforts of very poor people all over the world have been on record over the past 35 years by Father Joseph Wresinski and the Fourth World Movement's full time Volunteers.[8] These accounts provide material for monographs about individuals, families or groups, drawn up in collaboration with the people concerned. About fifty of these monographs have already been published. The monograph approach, based on Father Joseph Wresinski's experience, discussions with individuals in extreme poverty and those close to them, and on methods used in anthropological studies and oral history, makes it possible:
– on the one hand, to locate the facts within a story, the story of the families and their environment, to reproduce its meaning as it is felt by the very poor, and to demonstrate the organic connections between various types of deprivation and the mechanisms that perpetuate the denial of human rights to the poor within a social group or in a larger community;
– on the other hand, to bring to light poor people's own efforts in the struggle against poverty and to open up the way to understanding and action involving a larger population group.

The monographs also benefit from both types of the knowledge described above: not only field surveys but also knowledge of grass-roots protagonists.

The monographs published in this study were a positive activity in themselves. The mere fact that very poor families took a good look at their own life stories enabled them to appreciate where their strengths, and those of their environment, lay. By strengthening their family identity and enabling them to redefine their place in their community and in society, the monographs not only "reinforced their independence" but also enabled them to bring their creativity, thinking and proposals for action to bear on the task of improving their lives and those of the other members of their communities.

The International ATD Fourth World Movement Institute for Research and Training in Human Relations, which began in 1961, did many studies using the monograph approach, including economic and historical work on very poor populations as well as research on projects to end the social exclusion poverty causes. One result of this work, which was carried out, from design to implementation and assessment in collaboration with the poorest families, has been publications on various aspects of a coherent, comprehensive and forward-looking campaign against extreme poverty.

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[8] Full-time Volunteer, see International Movement ATD Fourth World in glossary

APPENDIX II

THE FAMILY IN EXTREME POVERTY IN THE BASIC TEXTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

I. BASIC TEXTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELATING TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE FAMILY, PARTICULARLY FAMILIES IN SITUATIONS OF EXTREME POVERTY.

The aim is not to make an exhaustive study of all the basic texts of the United Nations that deal with the family but simply to highlight the rights that those texts put forward, particularly those which provide a foundation for protecting the very poorest families and for a comprehensive policy which will lead to a reduction of poverty. The principal texts selected are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (1969); the Proclamation of Teheran (1968); and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

A. The way the family is perceived in the basic texts.

The basic texts reflect the concern and the constant regard of the Member States for the family and aim to ensure its protection and dignified existence. As is stated in the note entitled "Human Rights and the Family," published in 1992 by the United Nations Department of Information in preparation for the International Year of the Family, "*. . . the references contained in many legal instruments reflect the concern and constant respect of the Member States of the United Nations for this social structure.*"

Observation

> The basic texts were drawn up following periods of war or after catastrophes that put people in danger and this was the context in which those who defended human rights felt the need to provide protection for any family. There is therefore nothing astonishing about the fact that these texts match the wishes of the very poorest families. Unfortunately, this ideal, constantly expressed by the international community, remains for most of the time out of the reach of such families.

1. The family as "a natural and fundamental element of society."
International legislation recognized the family as early as 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the "*natural and fundamental element of society*" (Article 16.3). This statement is repeated in fairly similar words, although with certain slight variations, in several other basic texts. The family is called "*the basic cell of society,*" or "*the natural framework for the development and well-being of all its members.*" As such, it could legitimately be taken into consideration in the various texts and programs relating to the implementation of human rights and to development.

2. Family protection: a constant concern of the United Nations.

The basic texts express the determination of the international community to protect the family and to enable every family to lead a dignified existence and to discharge in a fully responsible manner the role and functions that it is acknowledged to have. **Thus Article 16.3 of the Universal Declaration and Article 23.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights set out the right of the family to protection by the State and society**: "*The family is the natural and fundamental element of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.*"

The Proclamation of Teheran stated in 1968: *"The protection of the family and of the child remains the concern of the international community"* (paragraph 16).

3. The roles and functions attributed to the family in the United Nations texts.

The family is frequently mentioned in the basic texts as an economic unit or as a place for the procreation and education of children and as a place to secure the well-being of its members. The family is also considered as a place to provide support for its members, particularly the most vulnerable who, besides children, include the disabled, the aged, prisoners or refugees.

B. The basic texts contain the fundamental ideas for a comprehensive family policy that would enable every family to live in dignity.

1. Providing every family with adequate living conditions.

The Universal Declaration states, ". . . *everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (Article 25.1).*

Although these are personal rights, they demonstrate the need for simultaneously establishing a number of essential rights providing for an adequate standard of living and a measure of well-being for the whole family, so that a person can shoulder his family responsibilities. This article thus lays the foundation for a comprehensive policy that takes the family into account.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights repeats these words and, in Article 11, adds the right to the continuous improvement of living conditions for the individual and his family. "*The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."*

The Declaration on Social Progress and Development, in Article 22, clearly states family policies to be one of the principal objectives of social development: "*The development and coordination of policies and measures designed to strengthen the essential functions of the family as a basic unit of society.*"

2. The right to privacy and family life.

The basic texts provide protection for the family in the area of economic rights and in the area of civil rights. Various provisions in the basic texts constitute the right of everyone to respect for privacy and family life and to respect for the privacy of home and correspondence.

Observation

> In situations of extreme poverty, failure to respect the civil rights that other citizens enjoy is frequent. This may take the form of interference in private life, violation or destruction of the home, etc. It is a matter of genuine urgency that steps should be taken to see that the texts concerning these rights are applied in the case of the very poorest families. These families always say how important it is simultaneously to improve living conditions and provide protection against arbitrary interference and obstructions to their right to determine the size of their family, etc. This is all the more serious because such attacks on their rights often occur when measures are being taken to provide social or international aid.

– Protection against arbitrary interference in the family, where both adults and children live their private lives.

In Article 12, the Universal Declaration considers the family to be an institution which should be immune from arbitrary interference or discrimination: "*No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his or her honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.*" This idea is repeated in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Article 17.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child repeats these words in Article 16 so as to guarantee that all children have these rights. In Article 40 (VII) it urges that this protection of privacy should be particularly ensured in situations where the child is subject to judicial proceedings.

– The right to create a family and to choose the number of children and their spacing.

This basic right is recognized by the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by the Proclamation of Teheran, which states in Article 16: "*Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.*"

The Declaration on Social Progress and Development considers this to be an exclusive right of parents and provides that: "*Parents have the exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children*" (Article 4).

It also calls for: "*. . . the provision to families of the knowledge and means necessary to enable them to exercise their right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children*" (Article 22 (b)).

The United Nations World Population Conference, held in Bucharest in 1974, stated in its final report that all actions relating to population policy should respect the right of the individual and of the couple to decide, freely and responsibly, the number of children and their spacing.

Observation

> Even in the industrialized countries where the population situation does not exert any pressure on the very poorest families, this right is frequently not respected where they are concerned. They are criticized for the number of children they have, which is higher than the average; they are advised, or even obliged, to undergo sterilization or abortion or to give up their children for adoption.

C. Promoting the participation of all families and giving them the means to exercise their responsibilities.

The Declaration on Social Progress and Development provides for the protection of the family not only to ensure the well-being of its members but also to enable it to exercise its responsibilities within the community and thus contribute to the development of society: "*The family as a basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, should be assisted and protected so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community*" (Article 4).

This Declaration contains numerous articles concerning the need for the participation "*of all elements of society*" both in the interests of society and in order to give everyone the chance of being useful and contributing to development.

Participation of all elements of society is, in any case, stated as a condition of development: "*Social progress and development require the full utilization of human resources, including, in particular:*
. . . The active participation of all elements of society, individually or through associations, in defining and in achieving the common goals of development.
. . .The assurance to disadvantaged or marginal sectors of the population of equal opportunities for social and economic advancement" (Article 5).

Article 15 urges States to adopt measures to ensure effective participation and to secure "*. . . an increasing rate of popular participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of countries . . .*" particularly through associations.

All the rights and measures set out in this Declaration, like the provision of free health services to the whole population (Article 19 (a)), the right to work and the free choice of employment (Article 6), the right to instruction and education of the whole population (Article 21), etc., are most frequently linked with the objective of promoting a higher level of participation by everyone in development and enabling everyone to play a useful part in the community.

Observation

> These texts imply the participation of the very poor, not only for reasons of equity but because the contribution of everyone, and hence the contribution of the very poor, is vital for society. This is what very poor families constantly request: to be useful to society and considered as partners. The Wresinski Report makes this one of the essential conditions for long-term effectiveness in the fight against extreme poverty.

II. FAMILY PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF ITS MEMBERS' INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

The United Nations note for the International Year of the Family stresses the family's important role in making a reality of personal rights: "*. . .Its well-being and its proper functioning, thanks to the support of its members, society and the State, retain an important place in making a reality of the basic rights of the person. . . .In today's culturally and economically diversified world, bringing these rights up to date calls for international cooperation based on the free consent of peoples and an understanding of the relationship which exists between human rights and the family.*"

Observation

Families living in extreme poverty remind us of the vital role that the family can have in making a reality of the individual rights of its members, particularly when other forms of support and solidarity are lacking. These families are nevertheless constantly threatened with disintegration. Their children are deprived of their families more frequently than others for reasons which have to do with extreme poverty itself, and this is done in the name of "the child's best interests." Could there be a conflict of rights or is it that the very poor families are asking us to revise our understanding of rights which, in theory, everyone is acknowledged to have?

The rights of the child are set out in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations and already signed by many countries. What prominence is given in "the Convention" to the family and to children living in extreme poverty?

In 1986, the General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the protection and welfare of children,** with special reference to foster placement and adoption nationally and internationally. As these practices apply particularly to children from the very poorest families, it is important to see how the texts are able to guarantee them the right to grow up in their own family, which they frequently express as their strongest wish.

A. The consideration given in the Convention on the Rights of the Child to children living in particularly difficult circumstances.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child and, today, the Convention on the Rights of the Child were motivated to a considerable extent by concern for children living in particularly difficult circumstances. Their situation is intolerable in the eyes of the world and shows what every child should be spared. In the Preamble to the Convention, the drafters were anxious to highlight this special attention: *"Recognizing that in all countries in the world there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration. . ."*

The Preamble throws light on the way in which the Convention should be interpreted and applied. The fact that mention is made in it of the attention which should be devoted to children who are the most exposed to difficult situations implies an obligation of everyone responsible for the implementation of the Convention to see that such children are genuinely able to benefit from the application of each of the rights stated.

Observation

Following an approach of this kind would make it possible to avoid the most disadvantaged children being in fact denied the benefit of the rights of the child, just as their parents are denied the benefit of human rights, on account of their extreme poverty.

B. The family, the natural environment for the growth and the well-being of all its members, especially the children.

One of the rights that children living in extreme poverty throughout the world are more frequently deprived of than others is the right to grow up in their own family. The possibility of growing up in one's own family in proper living conditions is nevertheless laid down as of fundamental importance for the child in the basic texts concerning children. The importance of the family for children is strongly stressed in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the

Preamble to the Convention: "*Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. . .*
Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. . ."

These two paragraphs of the Preamble state the principle that it is in the interest of the child to grow up in his or her own family, in the best possible conditions, and this principle is repeated in Article 7: "*The child. . . shall have the right. . . as far as possible to know and be cared for by his or her parents.*"

1. The overriding interest of the child—to grow up in his or her own family.
In the first few articles, the Declaration on Social Principles lays down the principle that the first priority for a child is to be brought up by his or her own parents and that this should be the concern of States:
Article 1: "*Every State should give a high priority to family and child welfare.*"
Article 2: "*Child welfare depends upon good family welfare.*"
Article 3: "*The first priority for a child is to be cared for by his or her own parents.*"

These articles throw light on the idea of the child's interests. The fact that they are at the head of a declaration which sets out to establish a code of practice and "universal principles" for fostering and adoption is a reminder of the priority which should be given to these matters in social policies. These policies should, as a matter of priority, aim to help the child's own family bring the child up rather than aiming for solutions which provide family substitutes. These articles make it an obligation to promote ways and means and family policies which enable the child to grow up in satisfactory circumstances in his or her own family.

2. The right to grow up in one's own family in decent conditions.
So that the child can grow up "*. . . in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and, in any case, in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security. . .*" (Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Principle 6) and so that the child can "*. . . grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. . .*" (Preamble, Convention on the Rights of the Child), the fundamental rights of the members of the family must be made a reality.

We shall quote here what Professor Smycinski wrote in his book, *International Protection of the Rights of the Child,* "*The problem of the family and its responsibilities is intimately bound up with the field of human rights, since the happiness of the family and the child depend in the highest measure on the effective application of those rights. . . Whatever is undertaken on behalf of the child, it is always linked with the way in which the family assumes its responsibilities towards the child. The family must therefore be central to the concerns of all those who wish to improve the lot of children.*"

Observation

> Meeting the overriding interest of the child, which is to be brought up by his own family, takes us back to the commitments entered into by States to make a reality of human rights and to the need, mentioned earlier, for comprehensive family policies which give priority to families threatened with break-up because of poverty.

3. The co-responsibility of the State and parents in making a reality of children's rights.

The responsibility of parents in making a reality of children's rights is stated, in particular, in the Convention:

". . . Both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child" (Article 18).

". . . The parent(s). . . have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development" (Article 27 (2)).

The State's obligation to show regard for the responsibility of parents and the family is mentioned several times in the Convention. For example:

"States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents" (Article 3 (2)).

"States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community. . . to provide. . . appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention" (Article 5).

It should be noted that this last article recognizes here the role that can be played, in addition to the parents, by the extended family and the child's environment. *"States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents. . . in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities"* (Article 18).

4. Avoidance of setting up the rights of the child in opposition to those of his or her parents and family.

Nothing in the basic texts should lead to the rights of the child being set in opposition to those of the family. This would appear to be contrary to the child's long-term interests or even to go counter to some articles of the Convention. Article 8 lays down, for example, that the child has a right *"to preserve his or her identity. . . name and family relations."* Article 29 (1) states that *"the education of the child shall be directed to. . . the development of respect for the child's parents."*

Observation

> The conflict, sometimes alleged in practice, between the rights of the child and those of his or her family, arises essentially when poverty prevents the family from showing regard for the child's rights (e.g., education or health care). What is at stake here is the co-responsibility of the family and the State. Can a State which has undertaken to make a reality of human rights accept that a family, and consequently a child, should be punished on account of poverty and bear sole responsibility for being unable to provide ideal conditions for its children?

C. The child separated from his or her family: a grave exception to the right of the child to live with his or her parents, which calls for the observance of solid guarantees.

Although the child has a right to live with his or her parents, there are cases when the children are separated from their parents or from one of them. In the various basic texts, this exception to the basic right to live in one's own family is accompanied by guarantees.

1. The interests of the child require that separation should be an exceptional measure.

Before making any mention of exceptions or guarantees, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on Social Principles both make a point of reiterating the principle that it is in the overriding interest of the child that he should be brought up in his own family.

The first guarantee against the danger of a child being unjustly taken from his family is thus, in these texts, to envisage separation as the last possible step after doing whatever can be done to support the parents in shouldering their responsibilities towards the child.

The Declaration on Social Principles also envisages calling on other members of the family to take the child in. This alternative has the advantage of preventing the child from being cut off from his own environment but requires that care should be taken, as with other kinds of fostering, to maintain links with the child's parents.

2. The decision concerning separation should be made with the parents.

After mentioning grounds for separation, the Convention asserts the right of parents, the child and even of the extended family to be heard: *"All interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known"* (Article 9 (2)).

The Declaration on Social Principles, in Article 12, requires that: *"In all matters of foster family care, the prospective foster parents and, as appropriate, the child and his or her own parents should be properly involved."*

This article encourages the search for dialogue between the parents, those who are going to be responsible for their child, and the representatives of the State bodies responsible for fostering. The dialogue should be continued so that the parents do not lose a sense of responsibility and so that family ties do not weaken, since this would lead to a temporary fostering becoming a permanent arrangement.

3. The right to the maintenance of family ties.

Unless adoption is arranged, where it is not possible for a child to remain with his or her family, contacts should nevertheless be maintained.

The Convention requires that the right to regular personal contacts should be maintained in the event of fostering: *"States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interest"* (Article 9 (3)).

Paragraph 4 of the same article provides that parents and the child shall be given essential information concerning the whereabouts of absent members of the family, so that this right can be exercised.

Observation

> In situations of extreme poverty, there are many different obstacles to maintaining contacts such as distance, not having a car, not being able to afford bus fare, etc. It is also difficult to welcome the child at home because of the weight of guilt which sometimes bears down on parents who know that they are unable to avoid the separation.

4. Fostering: a legal measure subject to review.

It is a serious step to separate a child from his or her family and this can only be done by a decision of the courts, with all the guarantees that go with it, (e.g., the measure is to be reviewed periodically, the various parties have the opportunity to make their views heard, etc.).

Article 9 of the Convention provides for judicial review of the separation and Article 25 gives the right to periodic review. In Article 11, the Declaration on Social Principles goes so far as to state that placement is temporary by nature: *"Foster family care, though temporary in nature, may continue, if necessary, until adulthood but should not preclude either return to the child's own parents or adoption."* In Article 12, the Declaration recommends that *"a competent authority or agency should be responsible for supervision to ensure the welfare of the child."*

5. The right to know who one's parents are.

A child's right to know who his or her parents are in the event of adoption or long-term fostering is now acknowledged, although the right is left to the discretion of those responsible for the child. The Declaration on Social Principles thus states in Article 9 that: *"The need of a foster or an adopted child to know about his or her background should be recognized by persons responsible for the child's care, unless this is contrary to the child's best interests."*

Observation

> Unfortunately, children from very deprived backgrounds are often witnesses to the contempt and lack of consideration shown to their parents, often by the people looking after the child. Foster parents who do not really believe in the capacity of the natural parents will make no efforts to help the child to trace his parents. In cases of adoption, the right to know who one's parents are is not yet acknowledged in most countries. In addition, when illegal adoption takes place, the child will encounter even more obstacles in attempting to discover his or her roots.

6. Adoptions.

In the event of adoption, the basic texts require that the parents should be able to make their decision in a fully informed way: *"Sufficient time and adequate counseling should be given to the child's own parents, the prospective adoptive parents and, as appropriate, the child in order to reach a decision on the child's future as early as possible"* (Article 15 of the Declaration on Social Principles).

Article 21 of the Convention requests States to ensure that the competent authorities determine *". . . on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives. . . and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counseling as may be necessary."*

Observation

> In situations of extreme poverty, pressure is brought to bear on mothers and fathers to consent to the adoption of one or several of their children. Frequently, no alternative is proposed (e.g., material, moral or educational support, etc.) to fit in with their wish to bring up their child while enabling him or her to escape from a life of poverty.

7. The training of those responsible for fostering and adoption procedures.

The Declaration on Social Principles, in Article 6, states that *"persons responsible for foster placement or adoption procedures should have professional or other appropriate training."*

Observation

> Training workers to know about families living in extreme poverty, the environment from which many foster children or adopted children come, would offer such children and their families better guarantees of being respected and understood.

III. A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW THE UNITED NATIONS TAKES FAMILIES LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY INTO CONSIDERATION.

In international bodies, the definition of extreme poverty set out in the Wresinski Report to the French Economic and Social Council, adopted in 1987, advanced thinking about and understanding of the links between human rights and extreme poverty. This is born out by resolutions, reports and programs implemented by the agencies of the United Nations system. The need for understanding of a different sort is beginning to emerge, i.e., the need to understand the links between extreme poverty, human rights and families. The examples given below are illustrative of these advances.

We quote from the work of the United Nations General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

A. The General Assembly of the United Nations.

The wish proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for a world in which humanity would be freed from poverty is still very much alive within the United Nations. There are many texts which make reference to this, including the International Strategy for the Fourth Development Decade and the resolutions on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty" adopted by the General Assembly.

1. International Strategy for the Fourth Development Decade.
The Strategy set out in resolution A/45/199 and dated December 21,1990 contains many of the ideas expressed by the United Nations concerning extreme poverty.

The Strategy states as one of its six aims: *"A development process that is responsive to social needs [and] seeks a significant reduction in extreme poverty, promotes the development and utilization of human resources and skills and is environmentally sound and sustainable."* This process is, for the Strategy, one of the major challenges which countries have to meet. It nevertheless adds: *"A decade is not enough to work miracles, but a true decade of development would make a great difference to the world situation on the eve of the next century and poverty and hunger would be pushed back instead of advancing."* The Strategy also stresses, in speaking about the priority aspects of development, that *"the objective of eradicating poverty is of the highest priority."*

The Strategy acknowledges that eliminating poverty from the face of the earth is a long-term goal but one which should not cause consternation nor fail to be tackled vigorously by the United Nations.

Observation

> The Strategy notes that the poor and most vulnerable sections of the population often remain on the fringes of development processes and that they may remain untouched by vast progress in development. It therefore mentions the need for special measures for such people.

The report entitled "Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security," which has already been mentioned, warns against such specific measures. While they might make it possible to deal with temporary difficulties, they include the risk of isolating the very poor still further within parallel networks which do not bring them genuinely into the main stream of the social life of their communities and may even consolidate a state of dependency and exclusion. Such specific measures should be purely temporary, making it possible to change over to a policy which takes account the overall situation of the most deprived and provides a safety net guaranteeing that no-one may one day have to fear that they might sink into a situation of extreme poverty.

2. Human rights and extreme poverty.

In its resolutions on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty," adopted in 1991 (46/121) and 1992 (47/134), the General Assembly declared itself ". . . *deeply concerned that extreme poverty continues to spread in all countries of the world, regardless of their economic, social and cultural situation, and seriously affects the most vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and groups, who are thus hindered in the exercise of their human rights and their fundamental freedoms,"* and stressed the need for adoption of *"concrete measures to eradicate extreme poverty and exclusion from society."*

The General Assembly welcomes the fact that the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission decided to carry out an in-depth study on extreme poverty, based on the experience and the thoughts of the very poor.

3. October 17, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

On December 22, 1992, on account of its disquiet at the worsening of poverty in the world, the General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring *"October 17 as International Day for the Eradication of Poverty,"* and requesting that due attention should be given to the specific problems of the destitute (A/47/196).

The resolution is based on the existence of the "World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty," celebrated since October 17, 1987 on the initiative of Father Joseph Wresinski. On that day, a stone in honor of the victims of poverty was officially unveiled in the Square of Human Rights and Freedoms, in Paris. At the very spot where, 45 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, this stone proclaims:

> October 17,1987
> On this day, defenders of human and civil rights
> from every continent gathered here. They paid homage
> to the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence.
> They affirmed their conviction that human misery is not
> inevitable. They pledged their solidarity
> with all people who, throughout the world,
> strive to eradicate extreme poverty.
>
> Wherever men and women are condemned
> to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated.
> To come together to ensure that these rights
> be respected is our solemn duty.
> Father Joseph Wresinski

In its 1993 resolution on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty," the Commission on Human Rights, referring to the celebration of October 17, reaffirmed the link between human rights and extreme poverty by requesting the Secretary-General to take into account, in the preparation for the International Day, the question of the relationship between extreme poverty and the full achievement of human rights, and, in that connection, expressed the wish that the Center for Human Rights, the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities would be fully associated with that celebration.

B. The Commission on Human Rights.

In 1987, the question of extreme poverty was clearly raised for the first time in terms of human rights in an international body. Father Joseph Wresinski asked the Commission to examine the question of extreme poverty as a challenge to human rights (E/CN4/1987/NGO/2). Father Joseph went further in introducing into international bodies and discussions the existence, experience and thoughts of people who had almost never before been heard for what they were.

From the very start, he showed what these new partners could bring to all the defenders of human rights in a statement entitled: *"The very poor teach us that human rights are indivisible"* (E/CN4/1987/SR 29, paras. 62-72). Commitments have developed since that time.

– In 1987, the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities requested the Special Rapporteur for the study on the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights to clarify the notion of the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights in light of the needs of people living in extreme poverty, whether in industrialized or in developing countries (Türk Report, document E/CN4/Sub.2/1990/19, paras. 139 to 217).

– In 1990, the Commission, **which had previously noted the need for a better understanding of extreme poverty in order to promote all human rights,** requested the Sub-Commission to go into the question of extreme poverty more deeply and to carry out a study on this topic (Resolution 1990/15, "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty").

– In 1992, the Commission clarified the objectives and the methods of the study on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty," recalling the need and urgency of **this move towards an understanding based on the thoughts, experience and efforts of persons, families and population groups living in poverty, as made known by themselves and by those working side by side with them on a long-term basis** (E/CN4/1992/11).

– Finally, in 1993, the resolution on "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty" made a reference to the celebration of the International Year of the Family in 1994 and in this way introduced links between **human rights, extreme poverty and the family**, which have to be studied in greater depth.

Observation

> The participation of the very poor, and particularly of very poor families, in an understanding of their situation represents an initial step in making their rights a reality. To know that one is consulted and heard means already that one exists in other people's eyes. Nevertheless, the participation of people and families who have been so long ignored and played no part in the debates on fundamental questions, requires that different ways and means should be sought and tried out with them, guaranteeing their genuine participation. The way in which this participation is to function also needs to be made clear.

In adopting this approach, the international community can use the experience of NGOs which have been working for a long time with the very poor and which contribute to making their voice heard. For example, for this study, members of the International Movement ATD Fourth World NGO Committee at the United Nations instigated a consultation of the very poor through the intermediary of their national branches.

C. The Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, composed of 10 members, is responsible for seeing to the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It met for the first time in September 1992. When the Committee drew up a list of questions about which it wanted to obtain more information and, where appropriate, have studies carried out, the situation of children living in extreme poverty was one of the topics selected.

In October 1993, the Committee devoted one day to the question of the economic exploitation of children, particularly in connection with the extreme poverty of their families and environment.

At its January 1993 session, the Committee examined the first reports from States. We shall take the report from **Bolivia** as it teaches us a great deal about the prominence which a country can accord the family as a way of countering poverty and because of its concern for the right of the child to grow up in his or her own family and its concern for children living in extreme poverty.

– On the subject of Article 3 of the Convention concerning **the best interests of the child**, Bolivia states that it has adopted measures to protect children, "*particularly children living in extreme poverty. . .*"
"*. . . It has proved extremely useful to examine the situation of minors living in particularly difficult circumstances.*" The National Commission for Solidarity and Social Development, which is responsible for providing protection and assistance to children and the family, "*has adopted a new approach under which the work of assistance and the placing of minors in institutions has been replaced by full training, participatory teaching and work with the family and the community. . . . Where preventive work is concerned, action is taken to strengthen the family unit as part of the overall program of help for the family.*"

– Where the **family environment** is concerned, the report states, concerning Article 5 of the Convention: "*Priority has been given, for example, in the case of children placed in institutions, to a clear policy aiming to enable them to leave these establishments and to rejoin their families because it has been found that 53 % of such children still had their mother or father.*"

Concerning Article 18: "*On account of their poverty, many parents are unable to discharge their responsibilities as they should or to exercise their rights. The State has recently given encouragement to a policy to combat poverty and to provide assistance and support to the poorest groups and sectors of the population, and this is a national priority.*"

Concerning Article 9: "*Starting from the principle that parents are the best educators of their children and that the family is the institution which must see to the safety, well-being and best interests of the child, the National Commission for Solidarity and Social Development has allotted funds and staff for the implementation of a systematic policy of reuniting with their families minors who, for various reasons, have been separated from them. The aim of all these actions is to work in co-operation with the family.*"

Observation

This report stresses the need to take the family as the foundation in promoting the rights of the child, whatever that family's situation, and especially if the family is in extreme poverty. It recognizes that the parents are fully responsible (their rights and duties) and acknowledges the need to support them in order that they can exercise these responsibilities to the full.

D. UNICEF.

The wish to protect the most vulnerable children in an effective way is the justification for the existence of UNICEF and has left its stamp on the organization's history. UNICEF represents, to some extent, the awareness of the United Nations of their responsibility towards the world's children. It translates into action the desire of the United Nations for mankind to respect the rights of all children. We shall see how this desire has developed and has led to new undertakings through:

1. The annual report entitled "The State of the World's Children."
2. The Executive Board of UNICEF.

1. "The State of the World's Children."

In recent years, UNICEF's publications have made it clear that civilization and progress are not measured in terms of GNP and technical resources alone. They are also measured by the development of the human conscience, the injuries it suffers and its reactions to suffering, by the refusal to give human beings what they need and by the violation of human rights. UNICEF's annual report entitled "The State of the World's Children" reflects this development.

In 1990, the report acknowledged that the phenomenon of extreme poverty was not confined to the developing countries only. It stated that ". . . *the children of the industrialized countries were not the first to reap the benefits of the growing prosperity of the societies from which they came, any more than were the hundreds of children whose lives were blighted by malnutrition. . . .*"

The 1991 report spoke of the need for better evaluation of UNICEF's activities. It said that . . . *it was more and more important for monitoring systems to avoid the pitfall of average. . . As averages improved, the monitoring process ought to strive more and more to calculate the percentage of those who fell below the average and try to discover who they were, where they lived and why they were on the fringes of progress . . . Monitoring of that kind had a better chance of covering deprived populations . . . and those living in absolute poverty.*

The 1993 report deserves fuller consideration. It appeals to the determination of everyone—governments, NGOs and individuals—to struggle against *"the worst aspects of poverty"* and to meet *"basic human needs."* **There is an ever present concern with the very poorest children and their families (and this is something new), supported by basic guidelines for action:**

– Give priority to the very poor since economic growth cannot, by itself, replace political will and the will of the people:

". . . It is also important to be aware that economic growth, even if achieved, does not in itself mean that basic needs will be met. In a great many countries today, including many industrialized nations and many developing nations that have enjoyed rapid economic growth in the past, the poorest 20 % have not shared in the benefits of that growth. In the

United Kingdom and the United States, for example, the 1980s were years of almost continuous economic growth in which the poorest of their peoples did not share at all."

The recent return to growth in Latin America also illustrates the point. Thus in Brazil or Venezuela ***"the very poorest families** have seen little improvement in their standard of living."*

– Proclaim as a priority:

"How much longer must the poorest families wait before it is decided that the world has reached the level of socio-economic development at which a few dollars per capita can be afforded to help them prevent millions of their children from becoming malnourished, blinded, crippled, mentally retarded?"

". . . The worst symptoms of poverty help to crush the potential of the poor, to reduce their control over circumstance, to narrow the choices available to them, and to undermine the long-term process of development."

– Break the vicious cycle of poverty which resides in the fact that:

*". . . the children of the poor do not usually receive the kind of start in life which will enable them to take advantage of the opportunities that do become available. . ." "This vicious cycle affects **poor and often large families** which are vulnerable to the malnutrition and disease that close the cycle and allow the current of poverty to flow from one generation to the next."*

– Support the efforts of the very poor in their daily struggle against extreme poverty:

*". . . it is vital to support the efforts of the very poor who will continue to struggle, as they have always done, to meet most of their own needs by their own efforts. . . Those in the forefront of the fight against absolute poverty—the poorest quarter of the world's people—are occupied almost every waking hour of every working day in the struggle to meet the basic needs of **their families.**"*

– Democracy and the participation of the very poor:

The progress of democracy in the world should provide an opportunity to listen to the most deprived people because, until now:

*"The children of the **poorest families** are the most powerless group in any society. In the wider world, the ground being gained by democratic systems means that the long-starved concerns of the poor may begin to put on political weight; providing basic social services for **poor families** with the vote is, after all, good politics."*

– An appeal to solidarity:

*"The cause of children and of the **poorest families**, the cause of those least able to demand priority for their own rights and needs, therefore warrants support on both moral and practical grounds. And it warrants the support of all those individuals and organizations, in all countries, that are involved in any and every aspect of the struggle for a more just and more sustainable world."*

UNICEF nevertheless notes, yet again, that it is extremely difficult to reach the very poor among those who are poor:

Regarding **health**:
"But because the victims of pneumonia are usually children from the ***poorest families,*** *without easy access to doctors and hospitals, antibiotics are often not available at all, or not available in time."*

Concerning **the environment**:
"From the point of view of millions of the poorest families on earth, a principle environmental concern is the ever-present threat of disease in their immediate surroundings . . . the lack of clean water. . . . This is the silent environmental crisis; and it takes its daily toll on the life and health of millions of those whose voice deserves to be heard in the environmental debate."

Finally, the 1993 report stresses that fighting poverty is vital to the advance of those other causes which are a priority for mankind: *". . . None of the great issues that are assuming priority today—the cause of slowing population growth, the cause of achieving equality for women, the cause of environmentally sustainable development, the cause of political democracy—will or can be realized unless the most basic human needs of the forgotten quarter of the earth's people are met."*

2. The Executive Board of UNICEF.
In 1987, the Executive Board heard a statement by Father Joseph Wresinski who stressed the fact that the situation of the poorest children and their families was indeed largely due to ignorance of their true situation but was also due to the fact that where the world did glimpse them, they were often considered incapable of thinking and collaborating in development and in the social life of their country. Father Joseph Wresinski pleaded for UNICEF to acquire a deeper understanding shaped by the actual experience, thoughts and hopes of the very poor, and begged for new efforts to reach them. Following this appeal, the Executive Board, in 1989, adopted its first decision entitled "**Reaching the Poorest**" (1989/8) in which it expressed its concern to meet the needs of children left on the edges of development because of their excessive poverty.

Through this decision, UNICEF questioned itself and the international community, asking why, despite good will and undeniable efforts, the children who are victims of poverty are not reached in a suitable way, are often even unknown and are rarely drawn into any authentic participation. UNICEF appealed to all partners in economic and social development and in human rights for progress to be made in understanding the very poor and identifying ways of ensuring their full participation in the future of the world.

Members states did not give this decision priority, or show much interest in it. For this reason, in 1991, the Executive Board adopted a second decision, also entitled **"Reaching the Poorest"** (1991/6). This again requests that UNICEF should undertake efforts in collaboration with governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to arrive at a more thorough knowledge of the poorest children and their families and to analyze initiatives making it possible to reach them most effectively. This decision explicitly mentioned families.

To provide a follow-up to this second decision expressing its concern, UNICEF has launched a study to evaluate actions that have reached, in a lasting and significant way, some of the very poorest children and their families. This study, conducted for UNICEF by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, will be completed in 1995.

E. United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The observation that, despite the efforts made at all levels, poverty in all its forms has in no way diminished in most of the developing world and has grown worse in the developed world, to say nothing of the countries whose economies are in a state of transition, has led the international community to emphasize the fight against poverty and to include this on the agenda of world development. In 1992, UNCTAD set up a Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation.

1. The Committee's terms of reference.

The UNCTAD Secretariat's thematic note states that the new world consensus concerning the reduction of poverty, as shown in the Cartagena Declaration and Commitment, had led to the establishment, under the auspices of UNCTAD, of the Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation. The Committee's task is to make the causes of poverty better understood, to assist in defining strategies and to stimulate the fight against poverty nationally, regionally and internationally. It is the first international body to be exclusively concerned with these questions.

The Committee is to concern itself with filling gaps in knowledge about the causes of poverty and the reasons for its persistence. It may, in this way, assume the role of the champion of this cause and stimulate the political will necessary for effective action—something which is often lacking.

The Committee set out to provide a framework for the exchange and examination of experience relating to the reduction of poverty and for the planning of projects that can be applied on a general scale and are likely to lead to lasting results. It is working with NGOs which have experience in this field.

2. The Committee's program of work.

The UNCTAD Secretariat's thematic note on the preparation of the Committee's program of work makes the following points:

– In many developing countries, growth in GNP has not been accompanied by a reduction of poverty, but has aroused interest in its reduction.

– The evaluation of the empirical aspects of poverty lags far behind the measurement of GDP and associated elements, which continue to dominate all that is said about development policies. There is a similar gap between the development of social indicators and that of economic indicators. Those in charge, nationally and internationally, very frequently do not fully understand how making the most of human resources reduces poverty and increases economic growth, since results do not appear immediately.

– Some analysts consider that the poor themselves should be asked what they consider their essential needs since they know better than anybody what they lack. Emphasis is frequently laid on supply, e.g., building schools and hospitals, without first finding out what poor people actually need and what access they have to these services. A better understanding is needed of the obstacles which prevent poor people from taking advantage of the opportunities and services available to them.

– Many services, particularly those for the poor, are wrongly considered social programs with an insignificant effect on production capacity.

– The burden of the adjustments brought about by the slow-down of the world economy falls on the poor more than anybody else.

– It is not easy to reach the poor unless they are mobilized and informed at the community level. It is therefore necessary to get them to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs.

– The NGOs, particularly those that rely directly on the participation of the poor, have an important role to play. The poor must be allowed to state what their problems are, and these must be taken into account in the preparation and implementation of programs reaching them. The experience of different countries should be studied in order to provide useful data to those concerned.

Observation

> The very term "alleviation of poverty" would certainly not have been chosen if the very poor and many working with them had been able to express their point of view when this Committee was set up. They know that, in the struggle against poverty, and even more against extreme poverty, there needs to be a desire to eradicate it and not to alleviate it if lasting results are to be obtained which do not exclude the victims of poverty in its most serious form.
>
> The Committee sees the "poor" as an undifferentiated and indistinct mass. This shows how much ground still needs to be covered regarding the understanding and participation that the Committee hopes to achieve. It is regrettable in this connection that the Committee did not target the **poorest families** as a priority. These families are taken as the basis for establishing fundamental guarantees that will prevent families from falling into poverty, protection will be extended also to others who are a little less poor. The families and their continual efforts to counter poverty should again show up clearly in the views and the work of the Committee. The Committee mentions families only from the point of view of population, family planning and the extra income deriving from the work of the children. Families are never mentioned as a force for advancement and development.
>
> How, in the context of the recent International Year of the Family and also in a more lasting way, could the Committee make use of the efforts of families living in poverty and extreme poverty in order to build up a partnership with them for the development of all?

F. The United Nations Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

1. The Center's publications concerning the family.

Within the United Nations, there are few documents concerning the family as such. Stress must thus be laid on the Center's publication of a series of four documents on this topic. The first, published in 1984 and concerning "Models to follow for the establishment of full welfare services for families and children," was a milestone because, ***"for the first time, it placed emphasis on the role of the family in development,"*** as its introduction states. This report examines in detail how to work out and apply a general method for providing full welfare services for the child and the family and seeks original and more effective ways of providing such services.

The programs examined in the report were implemented on different continents and were different in their extent and nature. Despite this variety, the report makes some very interesting observations, some of which concern families living in extreme poverty. For example:

– Encourage the disadvantaged to become aware of their needs and their capacities and to develop their ability to organize themselves.

– Make efforts to seek the social and mental development of any individuals, by encouraging them to give freely of their time, their thoughts and their efforts for the general good.

– Associate those concerned with decisions concerning the aims of the services provided.

– Make considerable use of the life of the villages (or communities reconstituted inside shantytowns) in a context of general development and not just of access to services.

– Pay more attention to the most vulnerable sections of the population rather than obtaining certain quantitative results. One of the bodies questioned stated that the only way of making the social worker's activities more effective was to get him or her to concentrate his or her efforts more on the most needy members of the population. Then society would consider the social worker responsible for the very poor and this would lead the community to realize that the least privileged deserved their due attention.

The conclusions of these publications on the family are not representative of all the comprehensive services provided by social welfare/entitlement programs and have no statistical validity. They are nonetheless filled with concrete, detailed information and amount to new solutions to the problems under consideration. They link comprehensive policy to concerns about reaching and ensuring the participation of the poorest as active members of their communities.

2. International Year of the Family (IYF).

In its publication for the launch of the International Year of the Family, "Building the Smallest Democracy in Society," the United Nations Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs laid down the principles and aims of the Year and, in one paragraph, examined the particular situation of poor families.

(a) The value of the general principles and objectives of IYF for families living in extreme poverty.

The first principle recalls the role and importance of the family for the international community. *"The family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention. Hence, the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to families so that they may fully assume their responsibilities within the community."*

Interestingly, the publication says that the protection and assistance families receive should not lead to deprivation of their responsibilities but should aim to strengthen them. ***"Programs should support families in the discharge of their functions, rather than provide substitutes for such functions: they should promote the inherent strengths of families."***

Observation

> Those responsible for implementing programs against poverty should make sure that these new guidelines are also adopted with regard to the poorest families and that people do not abandon the effort to allow them to exercise their own responsibilities.

The International Year of the Family made it possible to recognize families' needs, in all their diversity, and to try to provide a response to them. *"Various types of family structures exist today whose strong points and weaknesses are all so different. In addition, the image of the 'ideal family' varies considerably from country to country and within one and the* *same country. Family policies should therefore try to avoid giving implicit or explicit preference to one single ideal image of the family."*

Observation

> These considerations received more attention during IYF. Because of this recognition people will increasingly accept the poorest families within their own country. Hopefully people will stop comparing very poor families to an ideal or average they do not resemble (if e.g., they have more children than average) and no longer doubt their ability to raise their children.

The International Year should constitute an event within a continuing process: now there is a need to ensure appropriate evaluation of progress made and obstacles encountered both prior to and during the Year in order to ensure its success.

Observation

> There is no doubt that if there were to be an evaluation able to verify how the most deprived families had been able to benefit from the advances brought about by IYF, this would be a guarantee of the advances of the most deprived families.

(b) Families in poverty, destitution and other marginal situations.

"Poor families are exposed to forces driving them apart, resulting in migration, growing numbers of street children and homeless persons."

Observation

> It is to be regretted that the short paragraph devoted to destitute families confines them, by the words used to describe them, to a marginal situation even if the considerations which follow show to what extent these families are the victims of forces greater than they are.
>
> The poorest families are frequently broken up because of poverty. Their scattered members are frequently no longer considered as belonging to one family. The terminology used about them reflects this. The name "street children" makes people think that these children have the street as their family. It is, however, a name that they themselves reject. Similarly, the vast majority of the homeless and those with no permanent address have a family, and most frequently they have not been separated from it voluntarily but because poverty has finally broken the family apart. Children have been put in foster care on account of overwhelming poverty, because e.g., the father or children have gone off to a town or to some distant area to earn their living, etc.

"A family's destitution often implies the non-operation of a basic support system within society, with the result that familial responsibilities are then transferred to communal and national institutions."

Observation

> Experience shows that a family overwhelmed by destitution ends up being deprived of its responsibilities, which are then taken over by institutions whose purpose it is to help families in difficulty or to protect one of the members of the family (child, single mother). This privation of responsibility is an unjust punishment for being poor. It is contrary to the principles of IYF, which encourage the family to be supported and protected so that it can exercise its responsibilities, as we have seen above.

> After a certain degree of poverty and exclusion has been reached, no further attempt is made to support the family in its responsibilities. On the contrary, the family is deprived of them. The International Year of the Family should change this practice since it would be directly in line with its objectives and principles.

The paragraph concerning social services recommends protection for the family as a whole in order to be more effective: "*. . . designation of the family as an entity to which support might be given more effectively than to its disadvantaged members can be a valuable means to enhance the impact of social welfare services.*"

"*The Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programs in the Near Future*" calls for social welfare policies for meeting the needs of families, as well as those of their individual members.

Further on, it states that "*. . . recognition of the support that related family units and family members within a single unit can give each other could help policy-makers design more effective policy interventions to reinforce the ability of families to assist their members.*"

This section has taken a quick look at the fundamental texts of the United Nations concerning human rights and family rights. From it emerge, first of all, a number of principles acknowledging the family to be the natural and fundamental element of society which consequently deserves the protection of society and the State. These texts also contain references to principles providing basic elements for a comprehensive policy allowing every family to live in dignity. These rights include, for example, the right to adequate living conditions and the right to the respect of one's private and family life. These basic United Nations texts also recommend the active participation of all sections of society in defining and realizing common development aims.

There follows a description of the links between the protection of the family and the promotion of the individual rights of its members. The texts considered are motivated, among other things, by concern for children living in particularly difficult situations. They maintain that the family is the natural environment for the development and well-being of all its members and of the children in particular. The most important thing for a child is to grow up in his or her own family in suitable circumstances. The State has an obligation to support parents in shouldering these responsibilities. A child may be separated from his or her family only in extremely serious circumstances, and even in that case the child has the right to maintain contacts with the family and to know who his or her parents are.

Finally, this part of the study has dealt with the prominence given to families in extreme poverty in work currently being done within the United Nations system. It emerges from this that the participation of families in extreme poverty is an important element in the success of the anti-poverty program but that it has to be developed still further. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission, as well as the Executive Board of UNICEF, have not only acknowledged the need for a more thorough understanding of extreme poverty as one of the conditions of success, but have also acknowledged that this understanding must be reached in partnership with the people and families concerned.

APPENDIX III

SUMMARY
REPORT OF THE FRENCH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL "CHRONIC POVERTY AND LACK OF BASIC SECURITY"

by Joseph Wresinski

The French Economic and Social Council asked Father Joseph Wresinski, a member of this Council and founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, to write this report on Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security. Its objective is to put forth guidelines for a policy to eradicate chronic poverty. This report was devised in partnership with the poorest families from countries on five continents, and people or organizations committed to serving their interests. It brought about a wide consensus and was adopted by the French Economic and Social Council on February 11, 1987 with no opposition.

The Council defines chronic poverty and lack of basic security:

> *A lack of basic security is the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may become more extended and lead to more serious and permanent consequences. Chronic poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises their chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future.*

1. Chronic poverty, a violation of all human rights.

In this report, the French Economic and Social Council recognizes poverty as a violation of human rights. It provides an overview of poverty in France with the aid of available quantitative and qualitative data, the latter being in large part taken from the experiences and thoughts of the most disadvantaged population groups.

The Council concludes that poverty results in a lack of economic, social, and cultural rights. Any lack of basic security, whether of work, resources, housing, health, education or training affects all areas of life at the same time in a mutually reinforcing way. The Council affirms that poverty also results in a violation of civil and political rights. Unstable living conditions threaten the integrity of the family. And how can someone who has no permanent home or education or who has been unemployed for a long time participate in a union or in politics?

At the end of its analysis, the Council shed new light on the indivisibility of human rights, based on an understanding of very poor people's lives. Their inability to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights undermines the free exercise of their civil and political rights. And without the power to exercise their civil and political rights, they have no way of recovering their economic, social, and cultural rights.

Trapped in dependency and second-class citizenship, the very poor are definitively excluded from the advantages of most human rights. To overcome poverty and exclusion, we must allow these people and families to enjoy all their rights, and gradually assume their responsibilities.

2. The indivisibility of measures to overcome poverty.

Based on these observations, the French Economic and Social Council proposes an anti-poverty program made up of a combination of coherent, comprehensive and forward-looking measures which should be applied simultaneously. The implementation of this program requires authentic partnership with the most disadvantaged, which demands the creation of conditions for their participation at the local, social, and political levels.

The measures recommended by the Council concern all the major areas of life:
– as regards education, it is necessary to improve the access disadvantaged children have to basic education, with special emphasis on early childhood education;
– as regards jobs and training, the Council recommends providing those unemployed individuals who are the least skilled with training programs;
– to provide universal access to health care, the Council recommends generalized coverage of the expenses for illness as well as the improvement of preventive health care;
– finally, in the area of living conditions, the Council proposes measures to help disadvantaged families secure and remain in decent housing, and above all priority measures for housing homeless families, or families living in unsanitary, overcrowded, or temporary housing.

Two additional measures complete the preceding ones, and ensure their full effectiveness: social accompaniment and a guaranteed minimum income. Other measures aim to protect family integrity and access of the very poor to justice.

The Council seeks to make the fight against poverty and exclusion a national priority. It cites the need for better information on poverty, especially for young people, and the need to strengthen all efforts towards mutual support. A particular training should be given to current and future professionals who work with the poor (teachers, doctors, judges, social workers. . .).

Conclusion: An Approach to Pursue.

The proceedings of the French Economic and Social Council have helped to show the necessary indivisibility of human rights when the situation of the very poor is considered as a starting point. This also implies the organic unity of the measures necessary to find a lasting and effective solution to chronic poverty and exclusion. We hope these documents will inspire the members of the Committee and the Sub-Committee of the French Economic and Social Council in their efforts to promote human rights for those who are still deprived of them. We hope they will help the international community to move with the very poor toward the complete fulfillment of all human rights. Poverty devalues individuals, families, and communities. Every effort to eradicate poverty is one more step toward guaranteeing fundamental rights for all of humanity.

* * * * *

On August 19, 1987, the United Nations Economic and Social Council presented under the item, *"The New International Economic Order and the Promotion of Human Rights,"*[1] a contribution by the International Movement ATD Fourth World (Non-Governmental Organization with Consultative Status category 1) about the Wresinski Report focusing on extreme poverty and human rights.

> . . . Bearing in mind the urgency of responding to situations of extreme poverty around the world, which became worse and spread in the early 1990s, the International Movement ATD Fourth World calls on the defenders of human rights and particularly the United Nations procedures aimed at safeguarding and enforcing human rights to make the fate of people living in extreme poverty one of their top priorities. To this end, the Fourth World Movement draws the attention of the Sub-Committee to the very detailed policy statement that the French Economic and Social Council gave on February 10 and 11, 1987, following the report "Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security," which it entrusted to Mr. Joseph Wresinski. The policy statement and report have been made available to experts.

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[1] See Doc E/CN/4/SUB.2/87/NGO/12.

GLOSSARY

"Art and Poetry" has been an important concept in the Fourth World Movement since its beginning because beauty helps to break through the confinement created by social exclusion. In the Noisy-le-Grand housing camp, Father Joseph Wresinski asked famous artists like Jean Bazaine and Miro to contribute to their art. The Movement created places around the world where people can meet, be creative and share their skills in art, crafts, computer, studies, vocational training etc. with children, young people or adults from different social and cultural backgrounds. These places are art libraries, art workshops and clubs or houses of knowledge. The Movement's first art library was created in 1988, to enable all families to borrow reproductions of works of art. Other art programs exist in Europe and Asia.

Courtyard of a hundred trades. This program provides an introduction to community living and to various trades for children and young people who fend for themselves in the city streets. The Courtyard enables them to rejoin the existing structures of education and training, helps them re-establish links with their families, and become full participants in the development in their country. The Movement established the first Courtyard in Burkina Faso in 1984.

Cultural Center. These are at the heart of Fourth World Movement family advancement programs. These Centers' main tools are all kinds of books that will develop curiosity and knowledge. But they are also places where poetry and modern technology are accessible to everyone who enter the Center. The Cultural Center aims to recreate and strengthen bond between children, their family and their community, particularly with members of the teaching profession. In New York city, the Cultural Center was called "drop in center".

Father Joseph Wresinski. Born February 12, 1917 in Angers, France, Joseph Wresinski spent his childhood in great poverty. The courage of his mother who brought up her four children single-handedly, her determination despite everything to give them pride, a trade and faith in God, deeply marked the child, the teenager and the man who was to become the founder of the Fourth World Movement. After having been an apprentice baker, he went back to school at the age of 19 in order to train for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1946, keeping firmly within himself a wish to return to the poorest. His bishop sent him to the emergency housing camp at Noisy-le-Grand in 1956. When he saw how abandoned the families in this camp were, he sensed that he had found "his people," forgotten by everyone, brought together by the same history of exclusion. He promised that they would "be received at the U.N., the French Presidential Palace and the Vatican." He realized that on their own, these families could not break free from their condition. He formed with the families from the camp the association which was to become the International Movement ATD Fourth World Movement. He actively sought people who would join them as friends and supporters, some of whom he encouraged to dedicate their lives as full-time Volunteers. The actions, thoughts and books of Father Joseph Wresinski have influenced many people on different continents in all spheres of society, from very poor families to the highest political and religious authorities. Father Joseph died on February 14, 1988 and is buried at the international center of the Fourth World Movement in Mery sur Oise, France.

Fourth World People's Universities. Created in Europe in the 1970s, these are places for training and exchanges between poor families and those who recognize them as partners. Father Joseph Wresinski described them like this: *"Crossroads between the experience of life of the underprivileged and that of other citizens, they are places for the creation of a new relationship between people."*

Since 1975, the People's Universities have been the starting point of the international Fourth World Congresses, and it is from these universities that the delegations of Fourth World representatives to national and international authorities are chosen.

International Movement ATD Fourth World. The Movement was created in 1957 by Father Joseph Wresinski and the families of the emergency housing camp at Noisy-le-Grand in France. The Movement's objective is to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. The Movement is a recognized International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and, as such, represents very poor families in international organizations, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (consultative status, category 1), UNICEF, UNESCO, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Active members of the Fourth World Movement are men and women from all backgrounds and all political and religious beliefs.
Allies or supporters are those who agree to contribute part of their time and their skills to the Movement's work.
Members of disadvantaged families participate in, and help develop activities in their own neighborhood to reach new families who are often poorer than themselves and to support them.
Full-time Volunteers join the Movement on a long-term basis, dedicating their lives to the cause of the poorest. They often live in the community they serve and choose to receive minimum salaries. Single or married they live and work in teams.
Teams of Volunteers consist of 2-10 people working on any of the Movement's projects from neighborhood activities to U.N. representation. They were established in various countries in Europe in the 1960s, in the United States in 1964, then in Canada and, since 1979, in Asia, Latin America and Africa. There are now 350 full-time Volunteers in 23 countries on five continents.

Noisy-le-Grand. In the 1950s emergency housing camp near Paris, France where 252 families lived in fibrociment huts known as "igloos" without electricity and with only five water pumps to serve 2,000 people. Noisy-le-Grand was the birthplace of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

October 17. On October 17, 1987 at the Trocadero in Paris, in front of 100,000 people including representatives of human rights organizations, Father Joseph Wresinski unveiled a commemorative stone, bearing this inscription, signed with his name: *"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."*

Since 1987, this commemorative stone has been reproduced in Reunion Island, Berlin, Geneva, Manila and Strasbourg.

October 17 was declared "World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty" by the United Nations in 1992. In several countries, on the 17th of each month, people gather for a short commemoration in honor of those who suffer from extreme poverty, and to renew their commitment to them.

Street Libraries bring books, art materials and often computers to poor children in poor communities. In partnership with the parents Street Libraries are run by Fourth World Volunteers, allies or young people who themselves are from deprived backgrounds. Street Libraries can be found in a stairwell, on a piece of cardboard in the middle of the dump, on a blanket in a slum, under a bridge, in a cemetery where families live, or in remote country areas.

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FOURTH WORLD MOVEMENT PUBLICATIONS

The Human Face of Poverty, by Vincent Fanelli. 1990. $12.50

A history of the first fifteen years of the Fourth World Movement's involvement with some of the poorest families in New York City. Published by the Bootstrap Press.

The Wresinski Report: Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security.
1994. $10.00

The English translation of this groundbreaking work, written for the French Economic and Social Council. The Wresinski Report proposes an entirely new approach to fighting poverty based on partnership with the poorest themselves. It inspired new social policies in France, led to several United Nations resolutions, and continues to be studied in many countries and international bodies..

Blessed Are You the Poor, by Father Joseph Wresinski. 1992. $14.00

A fresh, revealing reading of the Gospel with the very poor and through their eyes. Whatever the reader's beliefs, this book leads us to understand better the poorest people today and in the past, and to recognize what they can bring to the world.

Family Album. 1994. $25.00

A testimony to the lives of the world's most forgotten families in photographs, artwork and texts. This compelling and hopeful book allows men, women and children living in poverty from more than 30 countries around the world to present their lives.

Its 160 pages contain 154 black and white photographs and 97 color reproductions of artwork, along with texts in different languages written by and with the very poorest families.

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"We want to bear witness, so that this will not happen to other people. . ."

In the first part of this study, very poor families from the U.S.A., Guatemala, Thailand, Burkina Faso and Germany tell their stories, stretching back over several generations.

Each of the monographs presented in this work was written, with the family's participation, by a team of Fourth World Volunteers who have known the family for a long time. The authors relied on several years of daily written records to which were added testimonies given on the occasion of specific events, interviews with members of these families and transcripts of their remarks during meetings. Finally the texts were reread by the families themselves. In this way, they were able to contribute their creativity, their thinking and their views about programs needed to ensure progress for them and their communities.

In the second part, the Fourth World Volunteers analyze lessons we learned from these stories. The families presented here differ from one another in their ethnic, geographic and religious origins. In spite of this diversity we can recognize common factors from one continent to another in terms of what families have to endure as well as their strengths, hopes and aspirations. They all ask first for respect. But they also ask others to recognize their efforts, often unseen, to keep their family together—and to support these efforts.

We must be respected even if we are poor and people must not say "look at him. He is anti-social. . . We have nothing to do with him, we don't need him!" It gives you such a blow to the heart that you just want the ground to swallow you. To be respected, that means to be considered, to be taken into account, that people treat us like everyone else.

Their voices break new ground in poverty policy. To be successful, programs need to be initiated, implemented and evaluated with the poorest themselves. Poor people must be considered the principal partners in their liberation.

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